

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER, 1924

Vol. LXXXII

NUMBER 4

Two Is Company

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE STORY OF A LIGHTNING
COURTSHIP AND WHAT FOLLOWED IT

By Larry Barretto

THE courtship of Civilise Prendegast and Alan Downes was as vivid and flashing as the mating of two humming birds on the wing. There was an iridescent gleam, a whir of tiny wings, incredibly swift-beating, and the particular world that had known them knew them no more—or, rather, it no longer knew Civilise. Alan, in this case, was the interloper.

Everybody had expected that when Civilise married, the circumstances would be unusual; but no one, not even Civilise herself, had visualized how extraordinary they would be.

There had been latitude enough in the current speculations. The gossips who sat in the high places of society, armed with almost uncanny prescience, had variously destined her for a multimillionaire or a stable boy, a duke or a debauchee, or a possible combination of these; but Civilise, who was always unexpected, flouted her fate and cheated the gossips by marrying

a man as well born as herself, and as irrepachable in manners and conduct as most young men. She might have met him in dancing school at the age of ten, save for the fact that he had no money.

That was the odd part of it, for Civilise had always needed money—a great deal of it—and the indications were that she would continue to do so. Those who were in a position to know believed this, and not without reason. Her stepfather, who footed the bills, believed it; so did her extravagant mother, who was always maneuvering a “brilliant” match for the girl, and so did the young man of the moment, who soon discovered that Civilise had a preference for lunch at Voisin’s or the Ritz, and considered strawberries fit to eat only in January.

She had other odd tastes, too—such as mallard duck and partridge, for instance. Once she had expressed a preference for venison out of season, and was bitterly dis-

appointed when it was not forthcoming. The man of the moment—who was old enough to be fatuous, if not old enough to know better—had sent a telegram to a guide in Maine containing an illegal suggestion, which he had followed up with a check large enough to insure the suggestion being immediately acted on.

In due course the venison arrived, but Civilise found it stringy, or perhaps she wasn't hungry, for the elderly admirer received a perfunctory note of thanks a week later; nor was she in, three days running, when he called up to suggest tea, motoring, riding, or anything else that might amuse. Slightly saddened, he had withdrawn from the race, and it was about this time that Alan Downes appeared.

In his masculine way Alan was as good-looking as Civilise—tall enough, with broad shoulders, narrow waist, and a pair of legs that looked exceedingly well in riding breeches. He had aquiline features beneath a shock of blond hair, and the eyes of a mystic—wide, gray, and filled with the light of visions that usually have no place in a workaday world.

They had met in Central Park, in a manner quite unpremeditated by either. Civilise's horse had bolted for no apparent reason, and had gone flying down a bridle path, swerving dangerously near the trees, with the girl tugging at the reins, one foot loose from the stirrup, while she resisted a shameful impulse to cling to the saddle. It was early morning, and no one was about. Civilise had just time to be thankful for it, since she was considered something of a horsewoman. Then she stifled an impulse toward panic at the thought of herself lying helpless and injured when the furious beast beneath her should suddenly decide to buck.

Almost at once there was a roar of hoofs behind her, and a bay horse swept abreast, guided by a man whose uncovered hair blew in the breeze. Quite expertly he got a grip on the reins near the bit; and after some fifty yards more the black came to a halt and glanced back, mild-eyed, to see if his mistress was still with him.

All this was usual enough. Horses have bolted in the park before, and have been stopped; but Civilise's manner of thanks was hardly customary. One glance had told her that this man was a stranger, and therefore his interference was almost an impertinence.

"I'd have had him under control in another fifty feet," she observed, somewhat breathlessly. "You hard-mouthed devil!" she added, tugging at the head of her horse, which was now nuzzling inquiringly at the bay.

The man raised his eyebrows.

"Sure!" he agreed. "Mine bolted, too, and I grabbed at your bit to stay on. I had to get hold of something. Sorry!"

There was not a trace of laughter in his voice, and his gray eyes were perfectly sober, and even indifferent, as Civilise glanced up at him suspiciously.

He was very good-looking as he sat there easily, waiting dismissal. His riding clothes were pleasantly enough worn to make it certain that he had not hired a hack from one of the near-by livery stables. Somebody's groom, perhaps; but no—that was absurd. Grooms are as distinctive as detectives.

There was something vaguely familiar about this boy's face, and Civilise knew all the park riders, at least by sight. Hurriedly she ran over possibilities in her mind. Not her New York crowd, nor the riding set from Long Island. Possibly some one from Morristown, or farther back in Jersey. No, not that set, for she had known most of them since childhood. The North Shore? Maine? With a slight gesture of impatience she gave it up. Curiosity alone inclined her to courtesy.

"I'm almost sure I could have held him down, but he took me by surprise, and I might have had a nasty spill. Thank you," she added graciously.

Alan Downes was evidently unmoved by soft words.

"I'm sure you would have stopped him," he assented gravely. "He has a pretty spirit. Now I must go back and find my cap. It blew off."

He raised his hand in salute and drew the bay's head around.

Civilise was quite unspoiled, because she had always had her own way. Things were offered to her before she asked for them; but this young man had not attempted conversation. He had not even accepted the implied invitation in her voice to linger and talk it over.

This was surprising. Usually a couple of men were waiting on impatient horses by the Seventy-Second Street gate, in hope that she would raise her riding crop in permission to join her on the ride. Sometimes

she nodded coolly. Civilise was twenty, with something more than beauty, and the world was at her feet.

The bay horse was quite around now, and his rider was about to flick him into a trot. A new sensation—pique—invaded the girl. For the first time in her life she resorted to subterfuge.

"Perhaps I'd better take one side of the path and help you look for your cap," she suggested. "I'd be a poor sport to let you lose it, after you've saved my life."

It amounted to that now!

Without waiting for Downes's assent, she swung her horse about and drew up beside him.

"You're very kind," said the man formally. "I think it blew off just beyond the bend."

They cantered along together, and presently the cap was found hanging on a bush. Downes gathered it in with a sweeping motion from the saddle, and they continued their ride.

The park had been touched with the palid green of early spring. Faint buds were swelling on the trees, and some bushes of forsythia were already a cloudy yellow. The girl sniffed the freshness of it through quickened nostrils.

"It's getting late," she said. "The avenue and the side streets will soon be deserted now. Another month, and the town will be cleared out."

"I suppose so," Downes nodded. "Do you go in a lot for that sort of thing?"

"What sort of thing? Oh, I understand!" Civilise was amused. "You mean seasons, migrations, following the herd, worshiping that sacred fetish society. Yes, of course! And you, too, more or less? I'm sure we have met somewhere."

It was out at last. If he would not reveal his name, she would force it.

"Alan Downes," he answered, as if he had interpreted her mind. "No, I don't play about, but I have seen you—just once—at the Hilarys' dance last week. It was my first and only appearance. I'm staying with my friend Jack Severance. He has been asking me to come since the war, but I'm through now. Don't like it."

His sentences were short and close-cropped, as if he were not greatly interested in the subject.

Civilise permitted her horse to slow to a walk.

"What's the matter with us?" she asked

curiously. "You needn't mind telling me. I know Jack Severance well enough not to repeat it."

"It wouldn't make any difference if you did," he answered coolly. "I've told him myself, and he still lets me ride his horse. Nothing's the matter with you except that you're all frivolous and ornamental and darned useless. You—society, I mean, of course—haven't an idea in your heads except what has been planted there by some one else. If there is anything good, it is lost beneath a coating of affectation, snobbery, and gold—or gilt. There, you've made me be very rude, and I shall probably be challenged by nightfall!"

He smiled charmingly while he said it, and his voice bantered as if she were a child. His thrust at the foibles and weaknesses of her particular set had been made with a blunted instrument, but he healed the hurt with his pleasant indifference. Civilise was not sure that he meant it at all. She stroked the satin of her horse's neck while she pondered an impertinence.

"Downes?" she said at last. "Alan Downes? And are you quite sure you know us as well as all that?"

Alan Downes was apparently more engrossed in the ripple of shadows playing over the blue water of the reservoir than in her question, but he answered readily enough.

"Yes, I knew you quite well until I was old enough to act for myself. I dare say you'll still find me in the 'Register' unless they've dropped me as a nonsubscriber."

Civilise Predegast bit her lip in vexation. This young man had an unpleasant way of turning the tables on her, and he had wit. Most men received her darts with vacuous grins, delighted at her notice. She decided on the subjugation of this one, if it took all morning. Then her thoughts switched.

"Downes! Of course, it bothered me. You're one of the Westchester Downses, aren't you? How stupid of me! Now I remember—"

She halted suddenly, turning scarlet. The face of the man above her shoulder had grown very cold, and a bleak shadow had passed over it. Evidently he believed that she had spoken with intention. She remembered only too well!

It had all happened before her day, but stories persisted. There was old Downes, evidently this boy's father—a gentle, book-

ish man whose fortune had been swept away somehow. That didn't matter; but there was his wife, a beautiful and metallic woman who could not endure the loss of money. Then there was another man, incredibly rich, on the outskirts of things. Something was wrong with him, but Civilise could not remember.

The girl's mind whirled on with the threads of the story she was reconstructing. There was a scandal of some sort, and one morning Downes had been found dead in his study. It was obviously suicide, so that no legal blame could be attached. His wife, however, had already gone to Europe with the other man. He had never married her, either, although years had passed. Some one had seen her last year.

"A painted harridan who had the insolence to bow to me when I passed her in the Hotel Negresco at Nice!"

And that was this boy's mother!

Civilise bent lower on the saddle to hide her hot face. For an instant she had a wild impulse to let her horse bolt again, but the stubborn brute would probably balk this time. Then she faced the issue squarely. She was not without courage, even in a thing of this sort.

"You must think me ruder than I am—and very cruel," she said quietly. "Of course, I had forgotten."

Instantly Alan Downes acquitted her.

"I know now that you had," he answered gravely; "and"—with a touch of old-fashioned formality—"I am sorry to be the cause of making you remember. Naturally it is difficult for me to speak, but it is not a pleasant story for a young girl. You see now why I am not enamored of society—not when it is spelled with a capital S."

Civilise's gratitude for his gentleness, his obvious desire to put her at ease again, was shot through with a flash of amusement at his divine innocence. Not a story for a young girl! Where *had* he been brought up—after that had happened?

She smiled at him with friendly eyes as they reached an exit from the park.

"I'm leaving you here, for it is getting late," she said, holding out her hand; "but I don't quite like to think of your having such unpleasant thoughts about us. If I—" Resolutely she put the thought of two important engagements from her mind. "Would it be very daring if I asked you

to tea this afternoon? We shall be quite alone, and I would like to know where you are going when you leave society with the capital S."

Alan Downes considered for a moment.

"I should be delighted to come," he replied, with just the correct touch of pleasure in his voice. "At five o'clock?"

Civilise nodded. Alan wheeled his horse and was gone before it occurred to her that apparently he knew neither her name nor her address. She looked down at her glove a little ruefully. The hand incased in it stung with the hearty grip of man parting from man. Nevertheless, she decided to be at home for tea.

II

ALAN DOWNES arrived at the house just off the avenue promptly on time. Civilise considered for a moment, as he was announced, that he had done rather a brilliant bit of detective work—unless, indeed, as was barely possible, he already knew her name. Then she dismissed the thought in the genuine pleasure of seeing him. As an adventure, the affair did not amount to much, although it might have been considered daring in the late nineties; but she found, in spite of its tameness, a thrill at the thought of further talk with him.

Downes was attractive, of course. That was something, but beyond this she felt drawn toward the silent young man who had taken her quite casually for granted, and had even been a bit rude. There was a somber quality about his face, which seemed older than it was—a quality that might mask wistfulness. Of that she could not be sure, but at any rate he was unusual.

Now as he entered the partial darkness of the great library, paneled in wood, its walls lined with shelves of books, the girl felt a slight sense of strangulation, and her will struck out in silent combat. His tall, straight figure had dominated the place, and subordinated its magnificence for a moment.

He instantly divined where she was, and came toward the lounge without hesitation. The police dog at Civilise's feet growled throatily, and then stilled under the continued stroking of the girl's shoe ruffling the stiff fur at his neck. She did not rise, nor did she extend her hand.

"You found the house," she said. "I had forgotten to tell you."

"Of course! I said I would come."

He was still standing before her. Civilise withdrew her skirt a fractional space, in invitation for him to sit down.

"There's plenty of room, and it's more comfortable than a chair."

As Alan sat down, the dog rose on his forelegs and growled again. Civilise kicked him impatiently.

"Shut up, Torment!" she commanded.

"Why Torment?" asked Downes, easing his length down on the sofa.

The girl did not answer for a moment. She was wondering how freely she might talk to this stranger. It was becoming essential for her to talk to somebody about a certain matter of importance, and she had the gift of impulsiveness.

"Torment? Oh, I don't know why. He's always been called that." She answered Alan's question vaguely, and then roused herself. "We'll have tea. Would you mind ringing the bell behind you?"

A footman appeared, bearing a tray heavy with china and silver—plates filled with toast and brioche, meringues and marmalade—which he deposited with dignity on a table before her. It was enough for a regiment, Downes thought, and the considerable remains would doubtless be thrown away. The servants had their own tea below. The waste of it filled him with irritation.

"Lights, please," she said.

The room was filled with soft radiance, and Alan Downes gave a little gasp of astonishment. In the daylight, in her riding habit, with her dark hair tumbled beneath her hat after the unceremonious bolt of her horse, she had been pretty enough—a boyish figure with flushed cheeks, struggling with the unruly animal; but now—he doubted if he would have known her.

She was wearing something of a sage green color, very cloudy—a soft material, perhaps *crêpe de Chine*—which clung to her figure, revealing the line of leg and thigh. About her neck was a string of crystals, rather large, and falling almost to her waist. In that light the facets of them glowed and flickered when she moved slightly. Again they became like very clear and lustrous pearls with a steady radiance within. Small crystals, too, glowed in her ears.

The man noted with instant relief that her hair was not bobbed. She had drawn it low about her head, and it lay in dark masses, with tendrils of rebellious curls

escaping at the forehead. It gave her dignity, but made her look younger—almost absurdly young, considering her poise. He at once revised his estimate of her age. She was hardly twenty, he decided.

The girl was watching him with some amusement, wondering if his penetration would make him realize that the lights had been kept off for this moment, and hoping that he would not.

"Like it?" she asked.

Alan looked away in some confusion. He no longer felt quite so sure of himself.

"I've been rude," he declared contritely; "but you make such a charming picture. I might be pardoned, since I'm a painter, you see."

Something caught his attention across the room, and he stood up, glad to escape the quizzical amusement in her eyes.

"By Jove, this is good! Whose is it?"

He was standing before a landscape, with cloudy trees in the background washed in against a pallid sky, and with the bent figure of a peasant in the foreground, and flashes of the evening light brightening the faded blue of his smock.

Civilise glanced after him.

"Oh, that!" she said. "A Daubigny—quite good, I believe. There are some more amusing things upstairs—a Taddeo Gaddi and two Viberts. I like him, even though his red cardinals have gone out of style. Come back here, Mr. Downes, and get your tea. There's Scotch, if you would rather have it. Now please tell me about your painting."

She had found her clew. In half an hour she had learned all there was to know about Alan Downes. Under her casual questioning he became enthusiastic, eager as a boy, and his face lost its look of smooth hardness. She, too, revised her estimate. He was hardly twenty-five, she thought.

Always she studied him with increased interest. A definite sympathy held her. Tangible bonds, it seemed, were drawing them together, so that once she touched his arm to help him over a difficult part of his story.

There had been his childhood, which, she gathered, had been very charming—for a time. He spoke of the rambling old place in Westchester, overlooking the Sound from a distance—a house of infinite wings and unexpected chimneys, their red bricks rearing slenderly against the gray-shingled roofs; a maze of rooms, low-ceil-

inged and spacious, the windows of which looked out upon a gracious, formal garden and smooth lawns stretching to the lane beyond. He made her feel the age of it, and its quiet dignity. The place had been inherited, and was not of recent construction. In the back there were stables and barns, with horses to be ridden or worked in the fields. The elder Downes had been a gentleman farmer.

It had been pleasant enough for the lonely little boy, much of whose time was spent in the company of a governess, and later of a tutor. There had been neighbors, of course, but evidently High Acres had not considered them often, and calling days, when the dogcart drew up before the door, were infrequent. There were other days, extending into weeks, when his father and mother were away—in New York, Civilise understood, although at least once there had been a trip to Europe.

Alan Downes said little of his mother, but the girl, her sympathies keenly attuned, was able to create the picture—a handsome, imperious woman, with flashing smiles and a keen play of wit, exacting, but generously impulsive with the little court in which she reigned; a woman who swept into the little boy's room at night, sometimes, after the lights had been removed, and hugged him convulsively before flying off to dinner below.

It was thus that he liked best to remember her. Her shoulders had been white and smooth to his touch, and always there was a sweet scent in her hair. Once the diamond ornament across her forehead had caught in his nightdress, and her hair had come tumbling down about her neck, while they shouted with laughter.

"Oh, Alan, you've wrecked me!" she cried, hardly waiting to repair the damage before rushing away to her guests—late, as usual.

Alan said even less of his father. He had been, it appeared, a quiet, studious sort of person, probably rather colorless, concerned with his books and the expensive experimental farm, infatuated with his wife, and quite bewildered by her. What he had thought of her friends—for they probably were not his—was not revealed.

Alan avoided the tragedy completely, merely remarking that the place had been sold after his father's death, at a heavy loss. The boy had been about twelve then, and already at school. From the wreck his

guardian—for of necessity the court had appointed one—had saved enough for him to continue his education. Later, some suitable place would no doubt have been found for him—perhaps in Wall Street; but young Downes had independent ideas of his own.

It was, he found, an utter impossibility to live among the people his family had known. They held no blame against the boy for what had happened, and of course the scandal was old in six months; but an angry pride had taken possession of him, and deep shame for the careless words that he had heard. Perhaps, also, he considered his mother's friends responsible *en masse*. At any rate, he solved the problem of his future neatly enough by running away.

Texas had held him for a while, and then he had adventured farther west—not entirely unsuccessfully, the girl understood, for after the war he had been demobilized in France, and there had been money enough to keep him for a few years while he studied in the *ateliers* of Paris. Now he was home to try his luck.

Civilise's mind ran ahead to possible commissions.

"I suppose you'll open up here in town," she said. "You do portraits, of course? Will you paint me in this dress?"

Alan Downes made a gesture of refusal. "You would be wonderful to do, and I should like to try it, but New York will only see me for a few days more. I'm going to paint in the country."

"The country!" Civilise was astonished and disappointed. "Why the country? You can get much more work in New York, and besides—"

She broke off, realizing that after all it should be of small concern to her.

"If by 'more work' you mean painting fat, powdered dowagers and trying to make them more beautiful than their pearls, I don't want it," answered Alan, with decision. "You see, I have a long way to go yet, with a lot of experimental work before me, and the country is the best place for that. I've got hold of a little box of a farmhouse in the Catskills. I got it dirt cheap, and I can carry it along by doing a certain amount of commercial work. Besides, I'm more interested in outdoor stuff just now—gray hills at sunset, and pretty ponds just before dawn, when there are thin streamers of mist over them—almost transparent it is. Some day I'll do some-

thing better than Monet's waterlilies. You'll see!"

He was all young enthusiasm.

"Waterlilies haven't any pocketbooks," murmured Civilise, practical for once.

A clock chimed somewhere in the distance—six silver notes. The girl rose to her feet.

"Good Lord, you'll have to go! I must dress for dinner."

Alan Downes stood up with her, his hand half extended.

"It has been awfully nice—" he said conventionally, and stopped.

It came over him suddenly just how nice it had been, this afternoon of confidences in which he had been able to let down the bars of speech without thought, with no hesitation as to the desirability of discussing himself frankly, knowing well that she could not fail to understand. People with the faculty of drawing him out were rare; the gift of sudden friendship was seldom bestowed. A fellow soldier during the war, a *midinette* in Paris, and, long before that, an old woman in Texas—there had been no others. At once the farm in the Catskills seemed less luring, infinitely remote.

"I'm sorry it is over," he continued reluctantly. "You've been very kind to a rather lonely man. Almost I'm persuaded to stay in New York and paint you—in that dress. I couldn't do you justice, though, so I guess it's good-by."

Civilise was thinking quickly.

"I wanted to talk to you," she answered, with a note of constraint in her voice, "about something rather important to me. You have been good enough to tell me a great deal about yourself, and I feel that I might be equally frank. Confession is good for the soul, they say. Oh, no, I haven't poisoned a rival or anything. It's just that I feel I need advice from some one whom I don't know very well, and who is disinterested."

Her laugh was nervous.

"I want to help," he assured her.

"Then—would you think me quite crazy if I asked you to meet me later at a dance to-night? The Gregory Gilberts are giving a dinner, with a lot of people coming in later. I hate to ask it, but there really isn't time to talk now. If you could show up there about half past ten, I'll let you take me home afterward. I'll tell them you are coming."

"I can dig up some ancient evening

clothes—if you're sure Mrs. Gilbert wouldn't mind," he added doubtfully. "I don't know her."

They were moving toward the hall.

"She'd better not!" replied the girl. "Thanks a lot for saying yes!"

Their hands touched for a moment, and she was gone up the wide stairs, turning to smile down at him from the landing. It was a friendly smile, with an unspoken question in it. Alan Downes permitted the patient footman waiting at the door to help him into his coat and hand him hat and stick.

"The Gregory Gilberts' at half past ten," he kept murmuring to himself, although he knew he would not forget.

III

THE gorgeous house of the Gregory Gilberts was ablaze with lights when his cab drew up before the door. An awning stretched across the sidewalk, masking the entrance from the little group of curious people who loitered there, straining forward to peer as the sound of music came from within.

A girl left her limousine, and, with bouffant skirts gathered knee-high, ran up the three steps, her shapely silken legs gleaming. She was oblivious of the staring crowd, or perhaps pleasantly conscious of them. A woman pressed forward eagerly, her eyes on the exquisite figure.

"I'd like to look like her," she muttered. "The beauty!"

But the man with her drew her impatiently away.

"Come on! She couldn't earn a dollar if she was put to it!"

Alan Downes, paying his chauffeur, wondered for a moment if she could. The idea of her attempting it was incongruous. He smiled a little at the thought. Then his hired vehicle was dismissed by a faintly contemptuous carriage man, and he entered the house.

His early life had taught him what to expect, and dim memories still lingered; but that had been a long time ago, and his isolation, and the brilliancy of it, made him catch his breath.

The foyer opened into a marble hall, spacious and severely cold in a white blaze of electric lights. One whole side of it was banked with pink and flame azaleas, which must have been brought from the mountains of North Carolina. Behind them rose

sentinel palms with glossy, tapering leaves, hardly reaching the ceiling in spite of their great height. To get such trees into the house at all must have been no slight engineering feat, and Alan wondered what held them upright. Pots would never do it.

A room beyond was filled with a maze of gay figures, dancing—girls in gold and blue, violet, lemon, rose—pale colors, picked out with fewer crimsons and greens, swaying in the arms of black-coated men who bent above them, passing and repassing the door, bobbing like marionettes pulled by strings. The confused hum of conversation rose, punctuated by a shrill laugh. Above it all was the music—not loud, but insidious, luring synchronization pouring forth in soft waves that beat upon the senses, stirring pulses and quickening heartbeats—the seemingly effortless work of the most perfect jazz orchestra in New York.

A footman recalled Alan to himself, and he went in search of a cloak room.

When he returned, his hostess was standing between the rooms, greeting new arrivals. At least, he supposed she was his hostess—an enormously fat woman with a good-natured face, who was dressed in maroon velvet, with a chain of emeralds falling to her waist. She surveyed him vaguely while he named himself.

"I am Alan Downes."

Immediately she smiled broadly and permitted him to press her pudgy hand.

"It is so good of you to come, Mr. Downes! I hoped you would. Mr. Gilbert is somewhere back near the buffet, I think, but do go in. You'll meet every one you know."

She turned to some newcomers, and Alan Downes passed into the other room, realizing that she had not the faintest idea who he was.

Civilise Prendegast was not immediately visible, and he permitted himself to drift about, amused and entertained. The music had stopped, and couples were seeking the window seats or wandering off in search of drinks and ices. He pressed back against the wall, listening involuntarily to a girl's chatter to a man, who, bending before her, half concealed her face.

"You've heard about Elenore, of course, and the last dance at Lafitte's? She and young Lindstrom, the Swede, were sitting out a dance behind some curtains—a window seat like this—and they must have

gone into a coma or something, because, when they came to, the dance was over and the place was locked. The cleaners found them in the morning!"

The man bent still farther forward.

"Did anything happen?"

The curiosity in his voice was hardly veiled. The girl laughed scornfully.

"That sweet-faced nun! I'm inclined to believe it was really an accident, just as she said. Anyway, she's going everywhere harder than ever. What can she do but brazen it out?"

The man spoke again in a lower voice. His partner laughed, with a note of triumph.

"No, you don't, Philip! These curtains are looped up. Sorry, but you haven't the shadow of an excuse!"

Alan Downes turned about and got a glimpse of the girl. She was very pretty, and her wide gray eyes were sparkling with mischief. Possibly she was twenty, although she looked seventeen. An astonished disgust filled him, and he moved away.

There was, it seemed, no object in his being here. He knew no one, and evidently Miss Prendegast had not come. He wondered rather indignantly why she had asked him, and then he put the thought away. She had been too frank, too sympathetic, to invite him for an idle purpose, and it was evident that she would not need men to fill her dances. He could not forget the definite appeal in her voice when she said that she had something rather important to tell him. He decided to stay a while longer.

A waiter offered him champagne, and he sipped a glass, with his eyes on the entrance; but Mrs. Gilbert had gone away, and no more guests were arriving. He made a quick calculation. With wine at so much a case, in these prohibition days, they must be spending enough to pay his expenses for the next five years.

The music had begun again, and to avoid the crowd he moved farther back toward another room. Some one had loosed a swarm of butterflies, and the brilliant, exotic things were darting overhead, bewildered by the noise and lights, swooping aimlessly and falling to the floor, to be crushed under satin slippers. Colored balloons followed them, tossed from hand to hand, kept up by the dancers below, who screamed with laughter.

Alan Downes did not find it amusing. Such a display of wealth might be pardonable, if only it were kept within the bounds of good taste; but azaleas and palm trees, butterflies and balloons! A small room seemed to offer escape, until he found it filled with older men intent on bridge, with high balls by their elbows, hardly speaking, while the whirl of shuffling cards filled the air.

Beyond was a dark entrance, evidently a conservatory, and he stepped in. The faint scent of flowers and the odor of damp earth reached his nostrils. A fountain plashed softly, and high up a sleepy caged bird twittered to itself.

The room was imperfectly lighted, and for a moment Alan thought he was alone. He seated himself quietly on a marble bench near the door. Then the sound of voices, held to an even monotone, came to him.

He half rose to go, but sank back again. What did it matter? The speakers were some man and some girl, who would not notice his presence. The champagne had flushed his cheeks, making his head buzz, and he was becoming slightly drowsy. His mind wandered aimlessly—Texas, the oil fields—that very cold sheep ranch in Colorado—the war—Nice—his mother. No, he must not think of that!

A woman's voice, raised sharply, aroused him.

"No, I will not! I don't care what he says. How often—"

The voice was smothered suddenly, and there was a muffled cry.

Alan sprang from the bench. By the time he had crossed the room, the girl had freed her face from the man's shoulder, and her voice could be heard again:

"You damned coward!"

The man still held her close, and he laughed triumphantly while he bent down toward her lips.

"A little training, my dear! I'm getting tired of—"

Alan Downes caught him by the shoulder and flung him back. Surprised, the man spun round, slipped, and fell ignominiously into a box of young shoots. He was up again in a second, and strode forward, his dark, heavy face absolutely livid with rage.

"What the hell?" he cried.

In the dim light Alan saw the man's fists clenching and unclenching.

"Perhaps you did not understand," he remarked evenly, "but the lady evidently objects."

The man made a furious movement.

"I'll have you thrown out of here!"

"Don't be a fool, Edgar!" cried the girl.

"If," said Alan, still pleasantly, "you do not get out of here yourself, I'll chuck you into that fountain until you cool off."

There was no faintest doubt that he could and would do it. With a muttered curse the man turned and left the room, brushing the dirt from his clothes.

Alan Downes turned to the girl, who was laughing a little, with tears not far from her voice, while she dabbed at her hair.

"May I take you back to the dancing?" he asked, and stopped short, peering down into the face of Civilise Predegast.

"Oh, Lord!" she gasped. "You! No, don't take me back, please. It will make it easier to say what I wanted to. I'm afraid you have just insulted the man I ought to marry. Oh, Lord, Edgar in a flower bed!"

Her laughter was hysterical. Alan waited patiently for her to quiet. Presently she had herself under control again, and, moving to a bench, she sat down.

"You are a very indiscreet young man," she said at last, glancing up sidewise at him. "Many girls might have been making only a pretense of objecting to being kissed."

"Were you?" he asked stiffly. "If so, I—"

"Not at all," she interrupted; "and you really have no right to think it. What I am objecting to is the constant love-making of that idiot. It's become a little tiresome—and a little hard, with my own family backing him. I wish they'd leave me alone!"

Her voice held unexpected passion.

A very curious sensation came over Alan Downes—a sensation as if he had been suddenly flattened out, and then, as the implication of her words sank in, as if he had as suddenly returned to normal size.

"Why do they want you to marry him?" he asked incuriously.

At the moment, the important thing was the apparent fact that she had no intention of doing so.

The girl made a gesture of impatience.

"Oh, it will further mother's plans. She's not above looking out for herself in the game of social prestige, and there are a few steps higher she would like to go.

You can't understand that, perhaps, but there are little distinctions which count when you're pretty high up in the game. We're near the top, but there are still houses where we're never invited to lunch unless there are more than ten others. Eddie could help there. The moment the engagement was announced, I can think of half a dozen women who would ask mother to lunch with only three or four others, and she'd be in heaven. Silly, isn't it?"

"Are they interesting—these lunches?"

"Lord, no—dull as a last year's show. It goes further than that, of course. I'm only trying to point out to you what it would mean to mother."

The girl was keeping her voice light, but Alan sensed a strain underneath.

"And what would it mean to father?" he asked gently.

"My stepfather"—Civilise pointedly made clear the difference—"would be delighted. We live well—too well—and you might gather, to hear him talk, that bankruptcy would be upon us at any moment. Sometimes I wish it would. Then we could have a new deal. As it is, we're constantly straining to keep up appearances, living gorgeously beyond our means, and bickering about it all the time. It's simply too disgusting!"

"Yes, but I don't quite understand," protested Alan. "Surely your family's scale of living wouldn't be much less if you married?"

"Not much it wouldn't!" exclaimed Civilise inelegantly. "It would be much more. Stepfather's a broker, and his dear daughter's husband would immediately throw all his business to stepfather's firm. Such has been delicately hinted, I believe."

"Is it much?" inquired the man who meant to paint for a living. Civilise stared up at him in the dimness with wide eyes.

"Why, you blessed innocent! The man you pushed around so impolitely is Eddie Hodenpyl!"

Alan Downes was unimpressed.

"Never heard of him," he said. Then he demanded abruptly: "Why don't you marry him, then?"

The girl drew back suddenly at the discourtesy of his words—for it sounded like discourtesy. A faint veil of reserve came over her, and for a moment he thought she was going to leave him.

"There's only one reason for marrying, isn't there?" she asked quietly. "I don't

love Mr. Hodenpyl. Forgive me for telling you all this. I was foolish."

She made a movement to get up from the bench. Alan repeated his words of the afternoon.

"I want to help," he told her.

The girl accepted the sincerity in his voice.

"You have—by listening. It is easier to talk to some one you don't know, I think; and they have been pressing me pretty hard lately. If only he would leave me alone!" Her voice was despairing. "The trouble is that he somehow fascinates me. I like him, and I hate him. He's like a snake. I feel perfectly numb when he looks at me, and yet I can't keep him away. It's like a power—a bad power."

"I'd like to kick his face in!" said Alan viciously. "Don't marry him. He must be a rotter!"

"He is!" she cried passionately, startling the man beside her. "He is! If mother or any one else thinks I'm going to put myself in competition with half a dozen chorus girls, I'm not—so there!"

She covered her face with her hands and began to weep—slow, choking sobs that shook her body. The man looked at the ground in dumb misery. He was not used to seeing women cry. A flood of emotion was rising dangerously in him. An instinct of caution warned him, for a moment, that he was floating in uncharted waters, whirling hazardingly on to new depths. Then he forgot it.

"Please don't!" he whispered. "Civilise—please!"

Presently her sobs grew less, and she groped in the bodice of her dress for a handkerchief.

"I'm a silly," she said; "but anyway I feel better. Will you take me home now? I can't imagine why I came here to-night. They're good-natured vulgarians—that's all."

Alan did not answer. He was, experimentally, in a new phase, and he felt that he needed time to adjust himself to it. His experiences had left him unable to cope with this sudden melting of his own contained composure. It made him feel very young and rather ecstatic. There had been other girls, and pretty ones, but somehow the knight errant urge had been absent in his contacts with them.

In the taxi, Civilise returned again to the subject.

"I'm not quite such a fool as you might think. Eddie really is a bad egg. Mother knows it well enough, and she ought to be ashamed of herself. I won't marry him, however, no matter what they say. I'd rather take the first beggar who presented himself!"

"I'm a beggar, and I'm presenting myself," said Alan Downes promptly and to his secret horror.

It was his voice, but only a moment before he had had no intention of uttering the words. Then he forgot his horror in intense curiosity as to what the girl would say.

"That," Civilise gave her opinion, "is rather sporting of you, Alan Downes! You're a nice boy, and gallant."

"But I mean it," protested the amazing voice which sounded like his own. "I don't propose to girls to be gallant, and I am a beggar."

The taxi swayed and flung the girl against him.

"Because you're going away, and because you have helped me, I want you to kiss me once," she said lightly. "It's the reward of merit!"

Then she was in his arms, his mouth pressed against hers. Her bare shoulders were satin smooth to his touch, like the petals of white flowers, and there was the faint odor of lilac in her hair.

"I will never let you go now!" he said, after a time. "It is incredible that this thing should have happened to me, but it has—and now I will never let you go!"

The taxi was drawing up to the house.

"Oh," said Civilise, "you'll feel better about that in the morning!"

But her own voice was shaken, and fantastic visions were forming before her eyes.

IV

MORNING in Jack Severance's apartment did not bring Alan Downes to "feel better about it," as Civilise had said, although his thoughts were overcast with doubts. Lying there in the four-poster oak bed, he decided that he was in love, for the first time in his life.

For a while he permitted himself to revel in the sensation of it. Something had happened that was as overwhelming, as inexplicable, as the sudden light of morning in the tropics. Yesterday he had been himself—Alan Downes—a young man habitually self-contained, definitely serious, with

years of work planned out before him—a person with a single goal, to whom love, marriage, and even the light distractions of life, could mean nothing unless he were to wreck his career.

Then, suddenly, the flash—and he had been saying things that should make him a candidate for a madhouse. It amounted to that, of course; but the girl's lips had been soft and yielding, her scented breath warm on his neck, and for all her gay courage she was a pathetic figure. Intuitively he had divined far more of her life than she had told him.

Her life! But what was he offering her in exchange? He had no money, no position. He was cutting her off from her friends, from the luxurious living to which she was accustomed. He was giving, in place of it, just himself.

It was an utterly inadequate return; but in his secret heart, with the optimism of youth, he felt that it was perhaps more than that. Anyway, Civilise should decide. He named her, his lips forming the word with half shyness.

There came a sound of splashing from the next room, and several gasps at the sting of icy water. Presently Jack Severance came in, wrapped in a dressing gown, and rubbing his head vigorously with a bath towel, which half enveloped him. He was a large, red young man, good-natured, and with enough money to insure his state of uselessness permanently. The two had met during the war, had liked each other, and had formed a friendship which had endured until this time, although they were seldom together.

Now, as he swung the bath towel, Severance called cheerful greetings.

"Hello, old rounder! Where were you last night? I waited up all hours."

Alan Downes stretched luxuriously once, then leaped out of bed.

"I went to a dance," he explained, hoping that his friend would not question further.

"A dance!" Severance was obviously astonished. "Why, you old hermit, I thought you left such nonsense to fat men like me! What dance?"

"Mrs. Gilbert's," answered Alan reluctantly, with an air of suddenly remembering. "The Gregory Gilbert's—yes, that was it."

"Phew!" Severance whistled. "Those gilded morons! Didn't know you knew

them. Did they serve pancakes and truffles, and have white goats for the guests to ride on?"

Alan grinned.

"Something like that. A large part of the insect life of South America was imported, apparently at great expense, for the evening. I don't know them. Somebody took me."

He stepped out of his pyjamas and disappeared hurriedly in the direction of the shower.

Severance was disappointed.

"Oh, well, of course, if you don't want to tell me—"

Safe, for the moment, beneath his shower, Alan affected not to hear. Later, over their bacon and eggs, the older man returned to the attack.

"Who was she? I might as well know. After all, I feel responsible for your youth while you're in the big city. You'll have to look after me on the farm!"

"Civilise Prendegast."

"Good Lord, that gay and giddy piece? She's too pretty for her own good, or anybody else's. There's talk that her stepfather, Mortimer Henderson, is going broke, but that Civilise will recoup the family fortune by marrying that dirty dog Hodenpyl. God help her if she does!"

Something in the face of the other man stopped him. Under the unwavering eyes opposite, he felt himself growing red.

"What is it, Alan? You don't mean—I haven't—oh, damn my blundering tongue!"

He ended with a half humorous gesture of resignation.

"Miss Prendegast will not marry Edgar Hodenpyl." Alan gave his opinion evenly. "She will, I trust, marry me. Probably I can tell you more about it after I have called her up."

Jack Severance stared in utter amazement, conflicting emotions sweeping across his face. Alan Downes poured a second cup of coffee with a steady hand.

"Stop gasping like a fish, Jack," he observed. "I've fallen in love, and I want to get married. What's so extraordinary about that?"

Severance found words at last.

"If I didn't know you had absolutely no sense of humor, I'd say you were trying to string me. You and Civilise Prendegast! She's charming, of course, and all that sort of thing. I know her well.

You're to be congratulated, but—my dear man, it's a delicate subject, but how about money? Do you know what that girl's dressmaker's bill is in a year?"

"No," answered Alan ominously. "Do you?"

His friend was resigned.

"If you *will* quarrel with me, you will. You are an idealist, and I love you for it, but I'll bet—no, I can't bet about your marriage, can I? Anyway, I'm betting myself that you'll never marry her. Her people won't allow it."

"They will have exactly nothing to say about it," smiled Alan, although his jaw had tightened perceptibly. "Now, if you will kindly get out of the room, I will telephone her."

"She won't be up until twelve," protested Severance. "You can't call up even the girl you're going to marry at half past eight in the morning."

Alan's manner was superior.

"I know her so much better than you do! Wasn't she in the park yesterday at nine?"

Severance paused at the door.

"Well, here's luck to you! After I've recovered from the shock, I may be of help. You'll need it!"

V

THEY lunched together at Voisin's. Alan had never heard of the place, but he was grateful for the secluded table and the quiet service of an unobtrusive waiter, who heard his order the first time and filled it correctly.

Civilise was lovely in a taupe-colored suit, with a small black hat drawn low over her forehead. Her cheeks, fresh without make-up, glowed and paled under his words, and her eyes, half averted, smiled mistily now and then. They were, he discovered, gray, with warm dark centers. He realized at once the impossibility of ever painting them adequately.

Something had touched her, also. Under the hard light of midday she was glorified, as he had been in the darkness. Pulsating with the intangible essence of life, she paused, hesitant, on the brink of new and strange experiences.

An older and more sophisticated man would have been appalled or amused at this courtship, which was simple to the point of crudity and effective in its simplicity. Alan, terribly in earnest, stated his case

without either pretty phrasing or ardent love-making.

"See here, Civilise, I meant what I said to you last night. Something has happened to me—something that I can't quite put into words, it has been so sudden; but the result is that I love you. It happens like that to some people, I guess, although yesterday I would have said that love—real love—was a slow growth. I don't say so now. Anyway, I want you to marry me. I never wanted anything so much before. I would do anything to get you, but, because it's you, I want you to know the truth. You ought to have a square deal. I haven't any money. I don't know that I'll ever make very much. I can't keep up with the crowd you play around with, and I don't want to."

He paused for a moment, but the girl did not speak.

"What I can do," Alan went on, "is to give you all the love a man is capable of. I'll give up that farm in the country, and get a job in town. There are plenty of commercial art houses who will give me a chance, or I can go into an architect's office. I'm a good draftsman." He drew a long breath. "My dear, take time to think it over thoroughly. It's a terrible risk for you, I know. I'm offering you only love in a flat."

He smiled, and his hand closed over the tips of her fingers, which were arranging and rearranging the silver by her plate. The issue had been clearly drawn between them, and now the girl could face it without hesitation.

"You've done something to me, Alan. What it is I don't know and don't care, except that I feel it can never be completed without you. Last night I lay awake, wondering, and I felt sure that in the morning you would feel differently. A taxi and a pretty girl do queer things to a man sometimes." She smiled across at him. "But now—well, now I feel that we can't be making a mistake!"

"You darling!"

Alan Downes had captured her whole hand. She continued speaking.

"I'll be a great trial to you, probably," she said. "My people did not bring me up to be the wife of a poor man, but I can learn. There's one thing, you old lamb, that I will insist on—there'll be no job in New York. You made me see yesterday how very important your work is, and I'd

be a poor sport not to let you try it out. You offer me love in a flat; I'll accept love in a cottage!"

The man's face had reddened with a glow of happiness.

"It won't be much more than love," he answered hoarsely.

Civilise laughed, her voice rather tender.

"Mostly they offer me steam yachts," she said. "I'll take your love."

Their talk from then on consisted of broken, unimportant, meaningless phrases pointed with sharp observations born of sudden necessity. The waiter brought coffee, which remained untouched. He presented a bill and withdrew. There was so much to learn, there were so many years to bridge, and words alone seemed inadequate to bridge them.

A woman in a yellow hat bowed twice, and, being ignored, left to spread the story that Civilise was lunching with a married man. Outside gay cars crowded the streets. People left the restaurant, bound for the theaters, and at last the pale spring sun slanted through the windows at the hour of three.

"I must tell your mother," said Alan.

"Leave the telling to me," she advised.

"It—it won't be pleasant!"

"All the more reason for me to do it," he insisted. "I want to save you unpleasant things."

Civilise laughed a little sadly.

"Better not. I'd like you to be friendly with my people, later, when things quiet down."

And so they left it.

Much later, toward six o'clock, Civilise telephoned the Severance apartment. Her voice was urgent, broken with impatience, and quivering with spirited anger.

"Alan, is that you? Just what we predicted has happened. No, she won't listen to reason, and I won't stay here another night. It's better not to, anyway. I'm supposed to be a prisoner here, and Mr. Henderson has just gone off to buy tickets to Bermuda for mother and me." Civilise laughed indignantly. "Bermuda, when the season is over!"

"I'll get Jack to drive us up to Greenwich, and we'll be married to-night," Alan assured her. "What's that about being a prisoner?" he demanded anxiously. "Can you get out when I come?"

"Certainly," returned Civilise calmly. "When the car gets to the door, just honk,

and I'll come down bags, and all. No one's going to stop me. Mother's just making a gesture—that's all. What year does she think this is—1780?"

"The car has been waiting for an hour," said Severance gloomily, from across the room. "I knew you'd need it. We'll drive up as soon as you get your things together. A dozen angry mothers are going to blame me for my share in this business!"

"Oh, no, they won't!" Alan was happily excited. "They'll thank us both for helping to clear their daughters' paths to the wealthy Hodenpyl. Lord, I'd like to see his face!"

The great car wound its way out of New York, along the Concourse, and took the Post Road toward Connecticut, humming smoothly. In the back seat, with bags piled about their feet, Civilise drew closer to Alan. He seemed the only familiar thing in all this portentous adventure, which had become suddenly more than adventure, and from which, for her, there could be no turning. Even Jack Severance's broad back had taken on a certain strangeness, as if she had never known him. A new shyness, a gentle reluctance to proceed came over her, but she felt for Alan's hand with confidence.

"You'll be good to me, won't you?" she whispered.

The man bent to her lips.

"What did your mother say?" he asked at last.

Civilise did not answer. Resolutely she tried to shut out the picture of her mother's red, angry face, the threatening finger, and a voice disfigured with passion.

"You ninny!" Mrs. Henderson had shouted. "You little idiot, to throw away one of the best catches in New York for a man whose mother"—she had paused—"whose mother is a woman I wouldn't have in my house! A man who hasn't a cent in the world—who wants to be a painter! I'd like to whip you into your senses. You'll stay in this room until we get out of the country!"

Alan, content in the girl's silence, did not press her again for an answer. His arm drew about her, and he clasped both her hands in his.

The ruffled waters of Pelham Bay had been left behind, and then New Rochelle and Rye. The sky became streaked with crimson streamers, which paled to gold and yellow. A tiny puff of gray smoke marked

New York, far behind. Presently it was dark, and through the thin-leaved elms of Greenwich an occasional star shone down.

VI

FAR back from the Hudson River and the towns which line its banks, deep in the hills, lies the hamlet of Pownal—a tiny place consisting of half a dozen houses, a church, which the diminishing population has made nonsectarian to save it from complete emptiness, and the country store. The State road has neglected Pownal in its march, and a casual visitor is an object of speculation and covert curiosity on the part of the inhabitants.

The people of Pownal are as humble and obscure as their homes—lanky mountaineers, mostly Dutch or Scottish by descent, who drawl in nasal tones at the post office, or languidly curse their plowing horses in an effort to wring a living from the impoverished soil. The women, leather-skinned like their men, are largely concerned with berry-picking and preserving, the curing of pork and the knitting of woolen garments against the bitter winter, when everything is snowed in from December until March.

The farm to which Alan Downes brought his bride was a mile beyond Pownal. It lay on sloping ground, a narrow, stony stretch of land extending into a dark glen flanked on either side by sugar-loaf hills locally known as Sheba's Breasts. The hilltops were often wreathed in heavy mist, and behind the western one the sun sank early, casting long shadows across the unfertile land and the strip of road to the copse of beech trees beyond.

From out of the glen a little stream swirled—a miniature tyrant, easily jumped by an active man, until the melting snows, when it became formidable. Then, roaring sullenly, it would spread beyond its banks, flooding the valley and rolling great boulders along its bed. When the water was quiet again, it was a good place for trout—red-speckled and rainbow-striped—which lay watchfully in wait beneath the gray stones, ready to dart with incredible swiftness at the doomed fly struggling on the surface. In the season, fishermen came from the Hudson Valley and the towns beyond—men who, protected to the waist in gleaming wet wading boots, passed and repassed one another with abstracted nods, intent upon their sport. They were prac-

tically the only strangers who ever came to Pownal.

To the left of the beech grove stood the house, a small, gray-shingled building, two stories high, with two rooms downstairs and three upstairs. It had low plastered ceilings and open fireplaces, and the kitchen opened in a wing from the rear. Beyond the house were the barn and the outhouses, but the stock had long since been sold, and no grain was now stored in the loft.

Alan had got the place for a song, he had told Civilise—only the amount of the unpaid taxes. It was a story common enough in this or any other rural community. Children had moved away, one by one, the girls marrying into the villages, and the boys seeking an easier and perhaps gayer life in factories and stores. The old people, unable to endure transplanting from the land that had known them so long, had lingered and eventually died, to be laid away in the graveyard of the meetinghouse. Thereafter the farmhouse and land had stood unoccupied, falling each year into further desuetude, until the improbable purchaser should come to redeem them.

Civilise, standing on the little porch, in which the rotting floor boards had been replaced, sensed the tragedy of it.

"Perhaps they lived too long," she suggested, linking her arm with Alan's. "Better, perhaps, to have died twenty years sooner, with their children all about them, than to linger until the fences were falling into decay, the barns leaking, and the cattle, old like their masters, were dying off. Poor old people, sitting on either side of the fireplace, lonely and alone, watching with frightened eyes the ruin of all they thought they had built so well! I think it's tragic, Alan."

She turned her head and wiped a tear from her eye. The young man drew her arm about his waist and kissed her.

"We'll redeem it with our laughter, then," he said. "I don't want you to be unhappy, dear. I couldn't bear to think I had brought you to a place where you would be unhappy. Is it because it seems gloomy? I knew you would find it strange, at first; but with you I could be content, and it's such a bully spot to paint! Look at the hills up there! I can count dozens of tones of green in them, and such masses of light and shade! When the sun sinks behind them, they are all golden light, and in the morning the mist is very lovely.

The place isn't half fixed up yet. We'll get more furniture and put everything in repair."

He was eager to please her, pathetically eager to have her share the beauties of the place he had brought her to. The girl looked up at him, smiling at his enthusiasm, her depression gone.

"This is a child that I've married," she thought, and a rush of tenderness flooded her.

"You're all right, and I'm all right, and the place is heavenly," she declared gayly. "Could you think I preferred the Gilberts' ball to this? I'm not down, old boy. For a moment I was sad, because the place is full of memories and old, gray ghosts. They've gone now. A week ago I couldn't have seen them, but now—marriage does strange things, Alan. It has made me feel as if"—she hesitated—"as if I were waking from a long sleep."

The sun dipped its rim beneath the hill-top, and a pale dusk stole across the land. A flock of crows, black shadows, cawing noisily, rose from a near-by field with heavy flappings and settled on the limbs of a tree. The slight breeze died, and in the silence the undertones of the splashing brook could be heard clearly.

Alan turned, and drew his wife toward the open door.

"Behold your home, Mrs. Downes," he exclaimed. "This is the cottage!"

It had been a delirious honeymoon. For a week they had trailed over their possessions, acutely conscious of the landowner's pride, tramping up the glen until it became impassable, its narrow walls closing in where a chute of water dashed from the heights above, and the girl was obliged to cling to Alan to save herself from slipping on the spray covered rocks. She had gathered great armfuls of maidenhair fern for the house, and columbine, and green and yellow striped jack-in-the-pulpit, like beautiful mottled serpents.

"Thornley would charge a fortune for these," she said; "and here they are for the picking!"

They had climbed the lesser of the Sheba hills, struggling through a tangle of virgin undergrowth, until at last, panting, they had reached the summit and looked beyond at other hills, forest-clad, stretching away to the higher Catskills. In the valleys an occasional clearing showed, a thin line of

smoke pointing out the houses flattened against the ground, with the tiny figures of distant men working in the fields.

"Our neighbors," Alan remarked.

Civilise drew close to him. The emptiness of it was a little frightening.

"I have seen it before," she said, "with summer hotels in the foreground to spoil the view. Here we have lost the world."

Alan had fished the trout stream, chagrined that his meager catch in no way compared with the luck of country boys, who filled their baskets with apparent ease.

"But I'll learn," he exclaimed. "It's only a matter of time. With my rods, I ought to beat them at their own game."

Civilise, too, was learning. Dressed in gingham bought from the village store, she swept, dusted, cleaned, and bravely attempted cooking. Alan as bravely ate what she cooked.

At that, she was not unintelligent.

"What any servant girl can do I can surely do also," she insisted, and continued her efforts.

Alan was a help here. His life in the West and during the war had taught him something of rudimentary cooking, and very casually, lest he might hurt her feelings, he passed on to her what he knew. Her hands gave her some distress, for they were becoming red and hardened, and she surveyed her pear-shaped nails with horror. They had roughened and lost their luster now. Alan suggested rubber gloves, but the storekeeper had never heard of such an article, and they had had to send to New York.

The girl was happy in spite of it, and Alan was doing good work. In the beginning she had had a tiny doubt as to his talent, for New York was full of incomplete artists; but his first finished canvas left her no doubts. It was glorious—a pool in the brook, all amber and brown shadows, but with a crystalline clearness about the water which gave it extraordinary depth. A tree, heavy-leaved, bent down and was reflected on the surface.

"Alan, you could sell it anywhere!" she exclaimed.

"I'll do enough for an exhibition, and then we'll put on a show," he answered, flushed with her praise. "What gallery shall I try for?"

So the days passed in a golden haze of new experiences. Alan was painting harder now, eager to catch the vanishing spring,

and there was always work to do about the place, for he had started a garden.

Civilise found less to occupy her, and there were long, quiet hours underneath the trees. She became a little lonely, until one day a collie dog appeared in the expressman's wagon—a puppy who yawned prodigiously and stretched tired limbs when she let him out of the crate. Soon he was scampering curiously all over the place, his feathery tail waving. He was a gift from Alan, and Civilise gratefully realized that in spite of his preoccupation he was aware of her empty hours.

A week later the expressman arrived again and unloaded four trunks. Civilise exclaimed in astonishment when she saw that they were her own. The tag on each was addressed in her mother's writing. Trembling a little, the girl unpacked them, and found her clothes—evening frocks, tea gowns, walking suits, satin slippers, a brocade cloak, fans, silks, satins, laces.

The unexpected memories of her old life caught at her throat, and she wept a little, on her knees before the last trunk, her face buried in the useless finery. It might have been her mother's way of reconciliation, but Civilise doubted that. Probably the clothes had exactly fulfilled their purpose when they stabbed the girl with old memories.

May slipped into June with hardly a break in the days to mark them one from the other; and then came the heat of July. The collie no longer flung himself about the farm in a torment of ardent curiosity, poking into improbable holes for elusive woodchucks, or following, with eager nose pressed close to the ground, the erratic furrows of a mole. Instead, he lay in the shade, his plumed tail waving languid greetings.

It was not easy for Civilise. She suffered severely from the heat, to which her summers, spent in Maine or the higher Adirondacks, had not accustomed her. Alan, on the contrary, was filled with an access of energy. There had been some orders to be filled for a magazine, which took time and annoyed him. It was important work, necessary for the money involved, but it was evident that he was hardly interested, although he did it conscientiously and with considerable spirit.

On a Friday morning he discovered that he needed supplies. His tubes of cobalt blue and Chinese white were almost ex-

hausted. The thought of delay disturbed him, for it would take several days if he sent to New York. Then he realized that it would be quite possible to replace them nearer at hand.

"I'll take a day off and run down to Hudson," he said. "They'll have everything there. You'll come, won't you, dear? We both need a change. The town can at least provide a movie."

But Civilise had declined.

"It's too hot," she replied. "I think I won't, if you don't mind. I'll be all right here with the Beast." Thus they had named the dog. "We'll loaf together. If you see a hammock, I wish you'd buy it."

She looked tired, Alan noticed, and her eyes were delicately circled, touched with blue shadows. She was sunburned, but her neck had lost its fullness, and she rested often. He was touched with compunction.

"This is no sort of life for you," he declared. "I should have known it. I feel like a dog to have induced you to try it!"

"Nobody asked me, sir," she said, dropping him a curtsy. "I came of my own free will, and I've never been happier. Go along with you now! I'll expect you about seven."

And so he started off on the trip to Hudson, half pleased at the change, half regretful at leaving Civilise behind.

It was still daylight when he returned, although the sun had dropped between Sheba's Breasts, and there was a coolness in the air. He had tramped up from the store, and now turned into the lane, his feet plowing up little mounds of dust that settled slowly behind. Hudson had been hot and stuffy. Even there life had seemed crowded, compressed into too narrow a space, and noisy. He was glad for the quiet of the hills again.

There was a pool in the brook, which he had deepened—hardly large enough to swim more than a few strokes in, but a pleasant bath. He thought of the cold mountain water flowing over his body, bringing it to new life, and he broke into a whistle of anticipation.

Civilise met him at the corner of the lane, where it turned off from the beech grove. She had evidently been waiting for him. The Beast beside her snapped at a myriad tiny gnats that circled exasperatingly out of reach just above his head. She had put on, surprisingly, a taffeta gown, pale lemon in color, with an orchid

girdle looped at the ends with knots of silk flowers. Satin slippers were on her feet.

Alan stopped and stared at her with pleased surprise.

"All for me?" he exclaimed. "Why, it looks like a party!" Then he noticed her face. It had a peculiar expression. "What's the matter?"

The girl glanced at the dress.

"Oh, this old thing!" she said carelessly. "I had to make myself look presentable. We—we have a guest."

She hesitated and stopped, the strange look in her eyes again.

"Who is it?" he asked.

Civilise took his arm and drew him slowly toward the house.

"You'll be amazed—perhaps shocked," she told him oddly. "Are you quite ready for a shock, Alan?"

"Tell me who it is," he said again.

Something very strange was happening. Suddenly it was making itself felt all around him. His mind flew ahead to impossible conjectures. Some friend of Civilise from New York—Jack Severance—Mrs. Gregory Gilbert—all these flashed in pictures before his eyes.

"Your mother is here," the girl told him.

Alan Downes did not lessen his stride, but his face turned absolutely white beneath its tan, and his throat contracted quickly, as if a hand had clasped about it. For a moment he gasped, and then he looked down at his wife with narrowed eyes. That was impossible!

"Somebody is imposing on you," he said harshly.

Civilise shrugged.

"She seems to know a lot about your past," she observed. "Anyway, I've been hearing heaps of stories about your childhood. She's quite a talker."

"How—how long is she going to stay?" he stuttered. Then his face lost its pallor, becoming brick-red. "And where is—where is—"

"'Lochinvar has left me,'" quoted Civilise. "For a beast of a Russian woman, I gathered, or something like that. We avoided details. Also, she's going to stay forever. 'Who but my Alan will take me in, now that old age is upon me?'" she quoted again, flinging her arms wide in a gesture of mimicry.

"The hell she is!" exclaimed Alan violently. "Nothing of the sort! I won't have it!"

Civilise stifled an impulse to hysterical laughter.

"It does rather spill the beans," she admitted; "but what can we do about it? After all, she's your mother, Alan. She's a middle-aged child without the slightest conception of right or wrong, and very entertaining. I'm really falling in love with her already."

"Of course!" he muttered ruefully. "My mother! I've heard she called him Lochinvar, the swine! Was there ever such an impossible situation?"

"Buck up and make the best of it," his wife whispered. "Here she is ready to greet the long-lost—"

Again hysterical laughter almost choked Civilise.

Quietly, almost grimly, the man approached the steps of the house. His brain whirled in a sick turmoil, in which he sought to find a solid foundation, something to which he might cling until this crisis had adjusted itself.

What his mother had been, what she had done, had become in the passing years a matter for resigned regret. Indeed, it was something over which he had no control; and he had trained himself to think of her but seldom. Their haphazard correspondence during his earlier years had largely ceased, Mrs. Downes wearying of his youthful scorn. His hatred of the shame that had become a part of him had subsided into a bitter contempt for the whole sorry affair.

If the problem had been presented to him dispassionately, he could hardly have wished for a better solution than to have his mother leave the man with whom she had fled to Europe; but to have that consummation thrust upon him unexpectedly, and here!

Slowly he approached the house. Civilise squeezed his arm encouragingly.

A voluminous woman with elaborately dressed white hair rose to greet them. Her face was heavier and older, with a tiny network of lines at the eyes, but it held an illusion of youth in the carefully put on make-up. The shock of seeing her thus, after years, was almost greater than that of hearing she was at the house. Her son might have passed her on the street without knowing her; only the eyes were the same, splendidly dark, filled with fire and irresistible humor.

Chords of old memories began vibrating

in Alan's heart. Silently he permitted himself to be clasped in her ample arms.

"*Voyons! Voyons!*" she exclaimed, wiping a tear away. "After all these years, my little boy! But I would not have known you. And with a wife! Your charming wife has already put me at my ease." She included Civilise in a graceful gesture. "And you? Will you permit a bad old woman to visit you for a while? My Lochinvar has left me!"

"I know," interrupted Alan hurriedly. "Of course, we're delighted to have you here—Civilise and I."

He glanced appealingly at the girl.

"Naturally," she responded quickly. "I've been abominably lonely. Now, if you will excuse me, I will see to supper. You will find us simple people, Mrs.—" She hesitated, and then smiled charmingly. "I shall have to know what to call you," she finished quite naturally.

Alan had a flash of admiration. Civilise was taking it splendidly, like a thoroughbred—much better than he was.

There was a glint of amusement in the older woman's eyes.

"Mme. Downes," she answered composedly. "I have always used my own name. By all means get supper, my dear. Call us when you wish, and in the mean time I will talk a little to my Alan. Naturally he is surprised at many things."

They seated themselves on the little porch. Hardly a suggestion of yellow light marked the departed sun. Pale dusk was gathering, moist with dew and the freshness of the breath of air that had sprung up. Across the road the trees faded and grew mysterious. A bat circled among them with erratic swoops. In the bit of swamp at the corner of the far meadow the frogs set up their harsh chorus, and suddenly the place was vibrant with tiny night sounds. Mme. Downes shivered.

"*Mon Dieu*, what do you do here, Alan? It is hideous!"

The young man, seated on the steps at her feet, raised his head from his hands.

"I like it," he answered slowly.

His mother shrugged.

"So? Well, there is no accounting for tastes. Your wife said you painted—*chic*, that, but surprising. Where did you get that talent? Not from your father, I am sure. Perhaps from me, but my painting has been enameling, rather than oils." She chuckled quietly. "Under the circum-

stances I can see how for you it might be congenial; but your wife—what of her? Surely it must be dull for a young girl to be living on an abandoned farm! Immured, isn't that the word? And a girl so charming, too! My dear, I must congratulate you on your good taste. I do not know my daughter-in-law's family, but I have been out of the world for a long time."

She sighed.

"Civilise likes it here," said Alan abruptly. "She came because she wanted to. She is perfectly happy."

His words were particularly sharp, for it had occurred to him before that the girl might find it unendurably dull, and the thought that some time she might wish to leave him filled him with fear.

"Of course!" answered Mme. Downes soothingly. "She is happy near her husband—quite understandable, that. What is so charming as young love—while it lasts?"

She gazed sentimentally at the sky. Alan was striving to introduce a difficult subject.

"I suppose we might as well discuss the reasons for your being here," he began awkwardly. "It will be easier, perhaps, if you will tell me what you wish to do. Are you staying long?"

Quite without emotion, in a voice which sounded flat in its monotony, Mme. Downes stated her case.

"Lochinvar left me at last. It was a thing that I had always feared, a thing that we women who give up the world for love always have to fear—the cooling of affection. I am no longer young, you know, and I have grown fat; but we had been together for so long that I felt a false security. I was mistaken." Her voice became perceptibly sharper. "A girl came to Cannes—a Russian who had been driven out during the revolution. She was a singer, I believe, or she did an act at the Casino. I only saw her once. Oh, she was beautiful—I'll grant you that! Those Slavs are often lovely, and she wasn't an exception; but you would think, at his age—well, anyway, he seemed hardly interested the night we went together to the theater, and I could have believed him quite indifferent; but the next thing I heard was that he had established her in another villa—in Cannes, mind you, and near enough to my home so that visits could be made without suspicion. There was only one thing

for me to do. I left. I shut up the house, discharged the servants, spent a week in Paris settling affairs, and then sailed for home. It sounds strange to call America home, Alan, but that is what it is. I have only been visiting for a long time in foreign lands."

Her voice had lost its sharpness now, and had grown fuller and softer. She leaned forward in her chair, which creaked slightly, bending toward her son on the steps below.

Alan did not notice the change in her voice, or that she had moved her position. He was cursing in an undertone, not choosing his words, shaking with humiliation and anger. Presently, however, he controlled himself.

"There was nothing else to do," he assured her stiffly. "Did—did he make any settlement on you? I believe it is customary in such cases."

His mother drew back again.

"Do you believe that?" Her voice was anguished. "Everybody else did, and I had no means of denying it. Women like me cannot deny—they can only keep silent; but I thought—I thought—oh, my boy, what I did I did for love only. I did it because there was that in me that made me follow when he called—that made me proud to have him on his own terms. I have never asked anything from him—not even marriage. For me to give all was not too much!"

"I am glad there was no settlement," replied Alan quietly, although he was beginning to tremble violently. "That would have been impossible. Have you thought at all of your plans?"

He was not looking at her. If he had been, he could not have seen her face, now a white blur in the darkness. It had grown suddenly very old, and had fallen into shadows of loose flesh, the eyes dark and questioning, with a frightened look in them. Her lips trembled, and the corners of her nostrils pinched in. Some definite change had taken place in her, and in that moment she realized her age. It did not lessen her chill feeling of terror.

"I have not thought—much," she replied at last. "My first idea was to leave France, and then to visit you; but I did not think to find you married. All these years I have neglected you, and now, when at last I have come, you do not need me. That is part of my punishment. I shall

not stay long—just a little visit until I am rested, and then I shall go away. I realize, as you must, that it would hardly do for me to stay here."

"Where would you go," he asked heavily, "without money?"

A cold hand clutched tighter at Mme. Downes's heart. If he had had any love for her, it was dead. She had come to him an outcast, and he had asked her how long she was going to stay.

Well, it was deserved. Some conception of the anguish, the shame, she must have caused him throughout all these years came to her, and a latent tenderness welled up within. It would not be her part to ruin his life again. She had danced, and now she would pay the piper, somehow—and alone.

So that he might not understand, she lied valiantly.

"But there is plenty of money. All these years I have saved; Lochinvar was generous. He did not make any settlement on me, but there is ample, and it is my own. There are my jewels, as well. They are magnificent, Alan. Some time I will show them to you; but it will not be necessary to use those. I have enough—much more than enough."

She hummed the notes of a gay chanson under her breath, thanking God for the darkness and praying that she had been convincing.

Suddenly Alan Downes had risen and was leaning over her chair, peering at her, trying to see in the gloom. Something had risen in his throat, something that scalded him, an unbidden emotion which he could not down. He, in his turn, had a flash of inspiration. In that moment he saw the tragedy of his mother's life—giving all, losing all, suffering, humiliated, spurned, and now singing a lilting song in a voice that did not falter.

"I think you are a splendid liar!" he said, choked. "Now tell me how much money there is."

Mme. Downes stopped singing. His head was very close, and she had an almost irresistible impulse to run her fingers again through his thick, fair hair. In her struggle to resist it, she clasped her hands together tightly.

"Tell me, please," he said again, very gently.

She would not tell him—she would not. Vainly she sought for other words of the

gay little song, but they would not rise to her lips.

"A few thousand francs," she said helplessly, and began to cry.

"And the jewels?"

"I left them when I went away."

Alan had dropped to his knees. His head was buried in her lap, his hands were stretched out to draw her down.

"Mother!" he cried, his voice muffled in the silk of her gown. "Mother, did you think I could turn you off like that? I had to know—I had to know all. You had a right to your own life—I think I understand now. Whatever has happened is of no moment, only that we want you to stay—Civilise and I!"

Mme. Downes was ruffling her fingers through his crisp hair at last. All the bitter intervening years had been blotted out. Alan was a little boy again. They were back at High Acres.

VII

THE Beast had found a snake, and was worrying it to death at his leisure on the porch of the house. Like a playful kitten he tossed it, evidently fascinated by its wriggings, and whining for his mistress to come and admire what he had done. This was one of the Beast's unpleasant tricks. All his game was immediately brought to the house. Usually, however, it was confined to squirrels and moles.

Mme. Downes, standing precariously on a chair, was shrieking her horror at the scene. She did not like any wild thing, and snakes, in particular, were an abomination. Civilise, standing at the door, was convulsed with laughter. Her mother-in-law was a ridiculous sight with her skirts gathered high about her plump legs, and the chair had a way of rocking forward in a manner that threatened to precipitate her from her perch.

Alan, in the lower meadow, heard his mother's cries for help, and, leaving his painting, wearily made his way toward the house. In the intervening six weeks there had been many such calls for him. Always they were unimportant, and he no longer hurried.

Mme. Downes could not accustom herself to country life. That she made the effort was evident, but something was always going wrong. Left to herself, the coffee boiled over, she scalded her fingers, she cut them peeling potatoes. At other

times a vicious tramp—invariably a harmless neighbor—was about to attack the house, or she was in distress because she could not hook her dress. Always she hated the loneliness and the quiet.

Her son could understand that. It was, he told himself, the complete change in her way of living. For years, spending her winters on the Riviera and her summers in Paris or Switzerland, she had been the center of a gay throng—Bohemians drawn from all corners of the earth, not too particular whom they met, and eager only for amusement. That Mme. Downes could furnish. Her wit was scintillating and her tongue pointed.

This quiet life was difficult for Civilise, also, but she was young, and therefore adaptable. It was not easy for Mme. Downes, however, and Alan began to doubt if it ever would be.

He did not draw back from this consideration. After all, as Civilise had said, she was his mother, and, having once accepted her problem, it did not occur to him to do anything but see it through.

He was far more troubled about his wife. Mme. Downes's discontent, though unspoken, had affected Civilise, and the hard work was evidently palling on her. She frequently wondered what her friends were doing, how the season went at Bar Harbor or Southampton. She was content to listen for long hours to her mother-in-law's tales about Europe.

These were entertaining enough, in truth, and well calculated to raise longings in anybody's breast. Not that this was Mme. Downes's intention. Her gratitude for the shelter afforded her was genuine, and she had no wish to be a disturbing influence; but to have been silent about her past life would have left her, a brilliant if garrulous conversationalist, with nothing to say.

Usually she was very friendly with the girl—indeed, she was fond of her, but sometimes they quarreled, and the sound of recriminations could be heard—angry voices raised, which suddenly subsided. The storms were little ones, rising from nothing and disappearing as quickly in tears and forgiveness, but the result was depressing. Alan felt that his work was suffering.

Now, as he came around the corner of the house, his mother's shrieks stopped. Civilise, her laughter overcome at last, had

removed the snake from the indignant Beast and had flung the broken thing out into the road. Alan paused to kill it with a stick.

Then he helped his mother down from the chair. Civilise, repentant, smoothed the older woman's clothes and went to get a glass of water; but Mme. Downes was very angry.

"She laughed and laughed while that horrible thing was wriggling over my feet!" she cried indignantly. "I might have fallen and been killed. She made no attempt to help me!"

Alan sighed.

"That was very rude of Civilise. She should have done something."

"If you could have seen how funny you looked," observed Civilise, from the door, "you would have laughed, too. Why don't you apply your sense of humor to yourself, *madame*? It is keen enough about others. Anyway, I'm sorry."

"I might have been killed!" repeated Mme. Downes vigorously. "Poisonous reptiles all about the place!"

"It was only a garter snake," protested Alan. "They're not poisonous at all."

"Well, how was I to know?" demanded his mother. "In France I never saw any snakes. You ought to get rid of that Beast—he's always bringing things for me to look at. There was a spider in my room this morning, too."

She accepted the glass of water, and tasted it. Civilise sat down on the steps and drew the little dog close to her.

"We will not get rid of the Beast!" she said indignantly. "He's about the only thing that makes life endurable in this place!"

"Oh, stop it! Stop it!" cried Alan, in utter exasperation. "Let's try to forget all about it!"

Mme. Downes had recovered her poise. The incident was past, and she had had an opportunity to be dramatic. Now she was ready to forget.

"I'm an old fool," she said equably, "and Civvy was quite right to laugh. Just reach me that fan, my dear—it gets hotter here every minute. Some time I'll even become used to snakes. You must admit that life on a farm has its drawbacks, at first; but I forget—for you young folks it is love in a cottage."

She covered half her face with the fan and surveyed them archly over it. Civilise

rose quickly, and opened the door of the house.

"Love in a cottage may be hell in a hut," she said, with a hard little laugh. "I suppose I'll have to get lunch now!"

"*Tiens! Tiens!*" cried Mme. Downes. "I have put Civilise in a temper, idiot that I am! Go back to your work, Alan. All is serene again. Presently I will go in and make my peace."

"I don't think I want to work now," he answered gloomily. "Call me when lunch is ready. I'll be in the barn."

He walked off, not glancing behind him, puzzling in his brain what was to be done. This was only an incident, but there had been many like it.

VIII

THERE had not been such a summer in years. Day after day the heat lay in shimmering waves, distorting perspective, and drying the road until it was ankle-deep in dust, which hung in clouds when any one plowed through it. The sun hung, a brazen kettle, in a cloudless sky as brilliant and hard as if made of metal.

Trees and bushes were lifeless, the leaves turning yellow under the drought, as if fall was at hand. The brook had dried to a thin stream, and trout died in pools too shallow to give them life. The entire countryside was stricken.

In the farmhouse conditions had reached a high tension. Civilise grew paler, drooping under the heat, her eyes large and faintly circled. Mme. Downes suffered even more. She made no effort to do any work, nor could she. When the heat of the porch grew intolerable, she moved into the house. When the sun, baking on the thin clapboards, had made the interior an inferno, she again sought relief outside. Her nerves suffered even more than her body, and she continually complained in a gently querulous voice.

Alan, on the contrary, worked in a frenzy of desperation, tight-lipped and silent. He had been promised an exhibition in the fall if he had a sufficient number of pictures ready, and it was essential now. His money was running low, for he had found the expense of making the house livable more than he had expected.

His mother, too, did not lessen the burden. Naïvely he had underestimated a great many necessities, or had not thought of them at all.

All his hopes were now pinned on the "show." Once the pictures were seen, he felt sure that they would be a success. Some, at least, would be sold—enough to carry them through the winter.

He was becoming frightened. The support of two women, accustomed to luxurious living, became a menace that drove him during his waking hours and visited him in dreams when he slept. A number of times he thought of throwing up the whole thing, going to New York, and trying to obtain a position which would provide for the three of them; but every fiber in him revolted at being chained to a desk at an uncongenial job, and he returned to his original plan.

It was Civilise who broke first.

It had been a particularly hot day, and not a breath stirred in the evening air. Alan had returned from a day of painting up the glen—an unsatisfactory day, for he had been unable to obtain the effects he wished, and three times he had painted out his canvas. He dropped his easel and paint box on the steps, and slumped down heavily beside them, too tired to put them in the house.

Civilise came to the door. He sensed her presence rather than heard her. She did not speak.

"Hello!" he said without looking up. "Supper ready?"

"What there is of it," she answered shortly. "I'm sick of cooking!"

Usually she wanted to see his work, exclaiming in admiration over it, offering advice, usually good, and exchanging with him the news of the day. Now her indifference stung him for a moment.

"Well, I'm sick of painting," he muttered, pushing back the hair from his eyes.

"Why do you do it, then?" inquired Civilise casually, and returned to the back of the house, without waiting for an answer.

Alan pondered the question. She knew very well why he painted. He got up and followed her into the house.

On the way he stopped to call his mother, who sat in her darkened room, dressed in a wrapper and swaying a palm leaf fan languidly.

Civilise, already seated at the table, eyed them a little defiantly.

"It's too hot to cook to-night," she said. "We'll have to eat what I could get."

On the table were a tin of salmon, some wilted lettuce, and a jar of dressing. A box

of biscuits completed the array. Even in very hot weather Mme. Downes was intensely interested in food. Her weight bore witness to it. She was epicurean, and appreciated dainty fare. When all else palled, there was still the pleasure of eating. Now she surveyed the table with something like disgust.

"My dear Civvy," she protested, "I never eat canned food, and you shouldn't, either. It's dangerous!"

"It doesn't worry me," returned Civilise briefly.

Mme. Downes warmed to her theme.

"Very dangerous, very dangerous indeed! Lochinvar knew a man who died in Monte Carlo from eating fish out of a tin. I was told he absolutely turned blue, at the end. Shocking!"

"Which end?" inquired Civilise politely. "However, if you don't want the fish, there is salad. Behold the salad!"

She gestured toward the depressed dish. As usual, she was filled with half hysterical exasperation, which might find relief in either tears or laughter.

Mme. Downes examined the salad, and her nose wrinkled. "*Absolument janée!*" she sighed. "It is quite dead. I might at least be permitted an egg. Alan, may I cook myself an egg?" she asked with dignity.

"If you light that stove to-night, I shall probably go mad and kill you both!" exclaimed the girl violently. "It's too unbearably hot!"

The older woman sat down heavily and began to weep.

"I'm not wanted—evidently I'm not wanted. What have I done to be treated like this? Not even an egg!"

Alan for once did not attempt to make peace.

"You two make me ill," he cried indignantly. "Mother, you raise a row about everything. Civilise, you might have made coffee, at least. I work like the devil all day, and then come back to a row!" He sat down and helped himself liberally to salmon, which he did not touch. "Why can't we live in peace?" he demanded.

"We did, until—until—"

Civilise did not finish the sentence. She crossed quickly to the window and stood staring out into the fading light. Mme. Downes completed the words for her.

"Until I came—yes, I know it well! Day in and day out you have shown me

that I am not wanted—that I am very much *de trop!*"

The girl whirled from the window.

"That isn't true! You know very well it isn't true! No one could have been more considerate of you than Alan and I. The trouble with you is that you came here uninvited, and have made no attempt to adjust yourself. You forget that this is not the Riviera and that Alan is not—your Lochinvar!"

"For God's sake keep quiet, Civilise!" cried Alan.

Mme. Downes turned white under the affront.

"So that is it!" she said slowly. "You think I come here, demanding luxury, the things I am accustomed to, that I am ungrateful, and that I make no attempt to adjust myself. It is not so!" Her voice suddenly grew shrill, shaking with anger. "It is you who cannot adjust yourself! Only last week you told me that you felt you could not stand it through the summer, that you missed your friends and your parties. Is that the truth?"

A numbed feeling settled about Alan's heart, and his mouth grew parched. What he had feared had happened, then. He had been a fool to hope that love alone would carry Civilise over this first difficult period until they were safely on their feet. It was useless to expect it—he understood that now.

A quiet depression settled on him, pierced with a stab of pity—not for himself. Against Civilise the cards had been stacked since birth. He sought blindly for words, ringing phrases that should draw her back, something to show her their life as it might yet be; but the words would not come.

"Is that the truth, Civvy?" he repeated at last, inadequately.

The girl by the window noted a deadness in his voice. To her ears it sounded like indifference—as if to an overwhelming piece of news he had responded "Really!" with hardly polite interest.

It came to her in that moment that perhaps Alan did not really care, that possibly the burden had grown too heavy for him, that he would be glad to be relieved of it. What she had said had been uttered in a moment of fretful petulance; from her mother-in-law's lips it sounded like a disloyal thought, a bitter accusation against the man she had married. However, since Alan did not care—

"Yes," she answered them both. "I said that. Perhaps I meant something different."

She paused, waiting expectantly for some word from Alan to show that he had understood, some gesture by which she might know that in spite of everything he would not, could not, fail her.

Alan did not answer. His head was bent over the table, and he slowly crumbled a cracker to dust between his fingers. Then he divided the crumbs into three neat piles, watching the process as if it were an experiment of vital importance.

"We must make some arrangement," he said at last dully.

Civilise cast at Mme. Downes a look of such venomous hatred that the older woman quailed under it.

"Arrangement?" she cried shrilly. "Arrangement? The only arrangement that can be made is that we three will stay here together till we die!"

With a little cry that was half a sob, she flung herself from the room. They heard the screen door slam behind her.

Mme. Downes glanced at her son. He sat, head still bent forward, not moving, as if he had not heard the girl's words. The silence in the room became heavy, choking.

"La, la, Civilise in a temper again!" she said doubtfully, seeking to ease the tension.

There was no answer. Once more the silence became unbearable. Then she began chanting in an uncertain voice:

*"Voici ma bouche, pour laquelle un peuple a
pâti de désir;
Voici mes—"*

Alan rose suddenly from the table, thrusting his chair back violently.

"For God's sake, stop that singing!" he cried brutally. "Can't you see my life is being ruined?"

He was gone from the room, and a moment later his mother, through the window, saw him striding along the dusty road, alone in the gathering dusk.

For a long time Mme. Downes sat staring at the table before her. Now and again she nodded her head, as if in answer to some one whispering in her ear. Once she began humming a gay little air, unconscious of what she did, as if enmeshed in old memories; then she stopped abruptly. Her lips formed in a thin line of determination, but her eyes looked frightened.

Presently she rose from the table and began clearing away the untouched supper with graceful, futile hands. At intervals she surveyed her fingers reproachfully, as if condemning them for their uselessness.

IX

BREAKFAST, next morning, was a silent affair. The three people seated themselves, rather ashamed of their outbursts of the previous evening, and avoiding one another's eyes. The weather had become more temperate, overstrained nerves had relaxed, and the meal proceeded tranquilly.

Alan at last mentioned the quarrel. The morning had found him still disturbed, unhappy at the thought of Civilise, but determined that in some way they should carry on until his summer's work was done. Then, if all went well, they might be able to make some other arrangement, and, free from the stress of forcing himself at top speed day after day, he would be able to regain his place in Civilise's affections.

It was a poor compromise, but he could think of no other. He felt that he had been hasty and unkind in his sharp words to both women. After all, the situation was not easy for them, and he should have realized it. With this in mind he made his apology.

"I'm awfully sorry for what I said last night. The heat must have got us all. I was certainly rude to both of you, and I regret it."

He passed his cup for more coffee, and smiled wistfully at his wife. Civilise nodded gravely.

"I started it," she said. "Madame should have had her egg, or whatever it was she wanted. I'm sorry, too."

"For supposedly well bred people we acted very badly," contributed Mme. Downes. "It was really my fault. I demand too much, and I realize it."

She looked older, as if she had had a sleepless night, and Alan noticed that she had left off her make-up. This in itself was an indication of severe mental stress. He was filled with compunction.

"Didn't you sleep well?" he asked gently.

"Une nuit blanche," answered his mother. "No, no, my dear—it wasn't anything that you said. Just the heat, I am sure; but it is better to-day. You should go to Aix some time, Civilise—the climate is always charming."

Deliberately she led the conversation away from the previous evening.

Civilise smiled faint appreciation of her mother-in-law's tact. Further apologies from any one would sound maudlin.

"I have been there," she answered; "and some day I want to go again. To-day I think I will go down into the valley—to Hudson. I really would like a change, so I think I'll go alone."

Mme. Downes looked relieved.

"*Bien!* No doubt it will do you good. The storekeeper will drive you over to the train, as usual, I suppose. I will stay here and keep house with the adorable Beast, and Alan shall paint, *ne c'est pas?*"

"Fine!" said Alan heartily. "We've all been too much under each other's feet. It will do us all good."

Soon after breakfast he gathered together his materials and started off far across the mountain. There was a distant view of soft hills that he wanted to get. At the porch he paused, irresolute, waiting for Civilise's customary kiss, but the girl passed him quickly with a light touch on the shoulder.

"Go along with you," she said. "You have a long tramp before you."

The words were uttered gayly enough, but as she turned from him her face contorted in a sudden spasm.

Left to themselves, the women went quietly about the task of setting the house in order. Occasionally one spoke and the other answered courteously, the conversation held to the key of small nothings. One might have imagined a mother and daughter living together in such harmony that any outward expression of affection was unnecessary.

They showed a disposition to linger near each other. Once their hands accidentally touched, and neither drew back from the contact. Their eyes smiled with apparent understanding. A gentle sadness enveloped them both.

The work was done, and Civilise, with a murmured excuse, began to write a letter. Then she dressed for her trip. Mme. Downes waited for her on the porch, but she raised her eyebrows in surprise when the girl came out.

"It is warm for a suit to-day," she observed. "Why didn't you wear a light dress, my dear? Who is likely to care in Hudson?"

Civilise had drawn a heavy veil across

her face. It concealed her, but through it her eyes shone suspiciously bright. If her face was pale, the pattern of the veil concealed it.

"This suit is quite cool," she murmured. "I'm going to walk to the store, instead of letting Gilks drive me over to the train, and the road is so dusty that a dress would get badly soiled."

Gilks was their nearest neighbor—a farmer who was always willing to hitch up his horse and drive them to the station. For him it meant an escape from the monotony of work.

Mme. Downes drew in her breath sharply.

"So-o-o! Well, perhaps it is best. You will have a pleasant walk."

"I shall have a pleasant walk," agreed Civilise. "A pleasant walk!" She laughed once, a broken sound without mirth to it. Then she bent quickly and laid her cheek against the older woman's. "I've been beastly to you sometimes, old dear, but I know you'll forgive me!"

Then she turned and started down the road with the free, easy stride of a boy.

Mme. Downes stared after her.

"Now that was very queer of Civilise—very queer indeed!" she said to the Beast, who came trotting around the corner of the house.

An hour passed. The train for Hudson must have come and gone. Heavily Mme. Downes rose from her chair and went into the house. She, too, had a letter to write; but the words did not seem to flow easily from the point of her pen, and she bit at the handle reflectively. She began a letter and then tore it into tiny strips.

"*La, la*, what a fool!" she exclaimed. "Where there is no other way, I must find the will."

The Beast pawed open the door and came in.

"What could be more charming than to spend my declining years in Eplessier?" she demanded of the dog. "Especially with the old servant of my youth—that kindly, mustached creature Mathilde, who will take me to board for almost no francs a month, and will make me grow the garden for her! Eplessier—*charmant, ne c'est pas?*"

The Beast wagged his tail dutifully.

"Ah, pah!" exclaimed Mme. Downes. "You are a fool, like the rest! That dirty mudhole in Picardy! I shall be dead of ennui within the year. Well—"

She turned again to her letter, and wrote rapidly:

MY DARLING ALAN:

The situation which has arisen is quite impossible. I am sure you understand that. For me to come back to America to live was a mistake, for I have been too long expatriate. To live here with you and Civvy is more than a mistake—it is a crime. Yes, I have been a criminal! Mothers-in-law should be suppressed. For all our little troubles I take the blame—a thing which is easy to do, since a way of ending them has presented itself. A week ago I had a letter from Lochinvar—yes, my dear, it is true—forwarded through my bank. He wants me back. The Russian is gone. She was terrible. She tried to stick him with a knife.

Mme. Downes looked doubtfully at what she had written.

"Well, she probably has by now," she muttered, and continued:

He wants his old friend to return—a thing he does not deserve, but I am going. If I leave so suddenly and without farewell, it is only to save you pain and me discomfort. I know that you do not approve of what I have done, that my way of living has hurt you, but I am too old to change now. Since we can neither convince the other, it is the better way. In Civvy you have a delightful wife, who will make you happy—alone. Tell her for me that few American girls are so *chic*, and think sometimes of your wicked but devoted old mother.

Mme. Downes sealed and addressed the envelope, and placed it in a conspicuous place on the desk. Then she went to the window and hung out the white cloth which notified the watchful Gilks that the wagon was needed for the afternoon train.

Her trunk had to be packed, but there was plenty of time. She could rest a few minutes on the porch. It would be after sunset before Alan came down over the hill, which she could not see through her blurred eyes. Mme. Downes rocked back and forth.

"Beast," she said huskily, "fetch me a snake or something!"

At her feet the dog growled softly, twitching in his sleep.

To Alan, striding down from the hillside, the house had a strangely unoccupied air. It lay as usual, weather-beaten and gray, half concealed by the beech grove and the dark pine standing sentinel-like before it; but no smoke rose from the chimney, and his mother's chair on the porch was empty. In a few hours it had become again a very old place, forlorn and faintly ominous in the fading light.

The Beast met him at the barn, hysterical with delight, waving an ecstatic tail. Alan, hurrying to the door, ignored the dog's frantic leaps. The front room was quite dark. Impatiently, uncertain what could have happened, he struck a light. Then he called. There was no answer.

On the desk, a white patch against the dark wood, lay his mother's letter. He tore it open and glanced through it, his face becoming red. Then he dropped it on the floor, unheeding, as another thought came to him. In their bedroom he found the letter that his wife had written. His fingers shook as he opened it, for instinctively he knew what it would contain.

Civilise's letter was brief:

DEAR ALAN:

I never thought I was a quitter, but I am now. You have done your best, old boy, but I can't go on. Love in a cottage has become hell in a hut. I'm not fine enough to stand it, and the rotten part of it is that I don't want to be. I think we both realize that our marriage was the result of a sudden and transient infatuation. I am at least glad that *madame* will be with you, and after a time I am sure you will be happy. Since this is all my fault, I feel that any arrangements for the future should be your decision, and I will agree to anything that you wish. Just communicate it to my stepfather's lawyers.

Take care of the Beast, in memory of a few happy days.

The letter was unsigned.

The man walked slowly into the living room, the sheet of paper crumpled in his hand. His mother's letter again caught his attention, and he picked it up.

Alan Downes suddenly felt very young and hopeless. He smoothed out his wife's letter and read it again carefully. There was no hint of indecision, no compromise. He began to read it a third time, and then threw it from him.

"My God, what a mess I've made of things!" he exclaimed, and laughed.

In the empty house his laughter had a grim sound, echoing back from the rooms above.

The Beast, hungry and a little afraid in this strange loneliness, nuzzled at his hand, striving to attract his attention.

X

THE Gideon Crawfords were giving a house party—a very gay party indeed. With youth, plenty of money, and a strong disinclination for anything but amusement, they had reduced the giving of parties to a science. The formula was easy. Gather

together a group of people of both sexes, usually not over forty years old, provide bridge tables for the indolent, riding horses or tennis for the strenuous, and plenty of wine and spirits for both. Leave them alone, and the party was bound to be a success.

There were other distractions, however. The near-by country club boasted one of the best golf courses on Long Island; there was motoring for those who cared for it, and on Saturday nights an excellent jazz band was imported from New York. On Sundays one might rest, either following up or forgetting the flirtations started the night before. Nina Crawford was not particular about that, either. She always disclaimed responsibility with a shrug of her thin, boyish shoulders.

"If a boy is old enough to go to college, and a girl is old enough to be a deb, they are both old enough to take care of themselves," she would say. "Notice that I never invite 'em younger. My motto is *laissez faire*, or the sky's the limit!"

Then her elfin brown face would break into a grin of amusement, and she was off to organize some new excitement. Certainly Nina was an accomplished hostess!

Week-ends saw the big white house crowded with guests. They motored down from the city along the Merrick Road, or a bus met them at the station. There greetings were exchanged between men bearing golf clubs and girls sunburned from swimming. In the background was the orchestra—men hunched over their covered instruments, waiting their turn in the Fords provided for their use.

When the train came in, there was always a flurry to get embarked as promptly as possible. Nina was strict about nothing but her dinner hour.

"I'd rather lose my husband than one of my *chefs*," she would petulantly inform late comers. "I got the first in New York, but I had to go to Paris for the second."

It was an eight-mile drive to the house from the station, which left little enough time to dress for dinner; so departures were always prompt, the cars racing recklessly along the oiled road, their drivers negotiating curves at dizzy speed. The bus followed more sedately.

It was late this Saturday night, and Nina Crawford was not on the veranda to welcome her guests. Probably she had already gone to her room. This was of no mo-

ment, however. Every one was familiar with the house, and a maid stood waiting in the hall to show newcomers to the rooms assigned them. The bachelors had quarters over the stable.

Jack Severance turned his car over to a chauffeur, and, with his bag swinging, crossed the lawn toward the buildings at the rear of the house. He jumped a flower bed awkwardly, crushing under heedless feet the late September asters, and presently found himself in the room usually at his disposal.

A valet knocked at the door with offers of assistance, and was sent away. Severance dressed slowly. There was plenty of time, for the women would not be ready for an hour. He paused to smoke a cigarette, and again to note with amusement the reading that his hostess had provided for him—a sensational novel of youth's indiscretions and a biography of Lincoln.

That was Nina all over, he reflected. She sought to please all tastes.

No one else had appeared when he went over to the house. He sank into an easy chair in the library, glancing through an evening newspaper, and wondering vaguely who had been invited with him. He had motored out alone, and had missed the crowd. There would be the usual people, he supposed.

After a time Nina joined him, dressed in yellow, with thin strips of black holding her gown over her shoulders. The brilliant color made her skin look even browner than usual. She slouched in negligently, with an incredibly long amber cigarette holder in her fingers.

"Hello, Jack!" she greeted him. "Didn't get down to meet you—had a beastly headache. Sorry! All gone now. Like this dress?"

"It's stunning," answered Severance untruthfully.

"Nonsense!" retorted Nina briskly. "I gave eight hundred for it, and it's a total failure. Get rid of the thing when I can afford to. Just ring that bell under the table there—we'll have a drink before the others come."

She seated herself on the arm of his chair and gazed down appreciatively at his well brushed head.

"You'll never go bald, Jack. I'd have an affair with you if I thought Gideon would care, but he wouldn't. He's not afraid of fat men."

"Nobody is," replied Severance gloomily. "I'd like to be dangerous for just one week!"

A Japanese boy came in with a tray and handed them cocktails. They took the glasses and raised them to each other.

"The best Martini I've had in a month!" exclaimed Severance, replacing the glass on the tray before him.

"Rotten stuff," said his hostess, with due modesty. "It gets worse every week. I'll leave Gid, if he can't do better!"

The cellar had not needed restocking in five years, and Nina Crawford knew it, but it was bad form to concur in praise of your own liquor.

"Who's staying here?" asked Severance presently. "Anything interesting?"

The lady in yellow disclaimed any such possibility.

"Dull as dull! The usual crowd came down to-night, I suppose. The Lorimer twins, Phyllis Spain, two sappy boys, and a Russian who can't speak English, have been here for a week. Three days ago Civilise and Ed Hodenpyl came out. It's been interesting to watch them."

Jack Severance was startled out of his usual calm.

"Good Lord, Nina, you shouldn't have asked them here together!"

Nina got off the chair arm and paced slowly back and forth.

"Well, I shouldn't have," she admitted; "but we needed a little life. I'm rather sorry now. Civvy hasn't been acting pretty. After all, there are limits." She raised her eyes piously. "As for Eddie, I should say he was frankly out to make Civilise. Now that she's a *divorcée*, I suppose he feels he has the right to. Anyway, they're having a rather desperate flirtation."

"But she isn't divorced!" protested Severance indignantly. "If Alan knew this, he'd tear Hodenpyl to pieces!"

"I don't suppose we could ask him here," decided Nina regretfully. "As for Civvy, if she isn't divorced, she certainly ought to be."

A girl and another man came into the room, and they went forward to meet them. Severance was fond of Nina, but of course he recognized her weakness. She would slay her best friend's reputation for the sake of an epigram, and her witticisms, frequently devoid of truth, were comparatively harmless only because people knew her well.

Nevertheless, Severance was worried. It might be all right, but on the surface it hardly had the appearance of decency. Alan Downes was too fine a man to be spoiled by such a heartless piece! Warmly he cursed the girl under his breath.

More people came in. Cocktails were served again. In the distance the orchestra began to play softly. Under cover of the noise Severance managed to speak to Nina.

"Do me a favor. I want to sit next to Civilise at dinner to-night."

"What are you going to do?" asked Nina sharply. "I can't have my table all messed up at the last moment. I'm putting you next to Phyllis Spain, for your sins. She's nearly thirty, and ought to be married."

"If you don't," he threatened, "I'll change the cards myself."

Nina shrugged resignation.

"I'll speak to the butler, then. Oh, here come Civvy and Gid. Shall we go in now?"

Severance crossed quickly to the girl standing by the door, and offered her his arm.

"Hello, Civvy!" he said pleasantly. "We're partners for dinner."

Startled, she glanced up quickly, and the color drained from her face, leaving the patches of rouge vivid on her cheeks. The glass in her hand trembled, and a few drops spilled to the floor. For a moment she looked almost ghastly, and then she recovered herself.

"Jack! Why, I didn't know you were going to be here!"

Severance moved so that his broad shoulders concealed her from the others in the room. He felt no pity, but she was obviously unnerved. It was for Alan's sake, he told himself, that he was screening her from curious glances. Every one there knew the story of that sudden marriage, and of his part in it. Probably half of them knew also that Civilise Downes had not seen him since that night.

"I didn't know you were to be here, either. It's a little trick Nina has," he answered a bit grimly. "Finish your drink. They're going in now. Did you get a touch of sun to-day? It's warm for so late in the fall. The driving was splendid, but such crowded roads! I've seen a play the censor will pull in a week. Where's the Russian who can't speak English?"

He chattered on, giving her time to recover herself.

Slowly the straggling line of people moved toward the dining room.

"Don't be a fool, Jack," said Civilise presently, quite composed now. "I was startled for a moment at seeing you so suddenly—that's all."

Nina had rearranged the seats, as she had promised, and Severance found himself next to Civilise; but the girl—quite deliberately, it seemed—turned her shoulder to Jack, and became engrossed in the man on her other side. He was the Russian, evidently, for they spoke in a swift flow of sibilant French, and Severance, hardly at home in the language, found himself unable to follow it.

On his left he found one of the Lorimer twins—a tall, fair girl with vague features, who greeted him languidly and then turned to her partner, a stranger to Severance. In the meanwhile he had an opportunity to observe Civilise.

She seemed to have matured in the months that had passed, and her vivid, mobile face, still exquisite, showed signs of hardening into a mask. At the moment only her eyes seemed alive. They darted restlessly about the table, as if seeking some one. Her lips were too red, her eyebrows too black, and she was filled with an electric tension, like the uneasiness presaging a storm. It showed in her hands, which were never still, rearranging the silver or twisting the sapphire bracelet on her wrist.

In the matter of dress Civilise evidently felt that marriage had emancipated her, for her gold brocade gown shot through with rainbow silks was expensive, but cut too low. Severance admired her back, even while he questioned the taste that displayed it. It recalled to his mind ugly rumors he had heard in town, to the effect that Hodenpyl was helping the girl's stepfather liberally. He knew that Hodenpyl was never liberal without a reason.

Jack was shocked again when she signaled the butler to bring her another cocktail. It seemed unnecessary, for the Crawfords served plenty of wine. She did not finish it, however, and it might have been a gesture made in bravado.

He permitted his eyes to wander about the rest of the table, while he nodded now and then to people who looked up, for the moment disengaged with their partners. There were about twenty guests, and Sev-

erance found that he knew nearly all of them. He had time to wonder how Nina managed to have what were apparently spring roses for a centerpiece. Then he noticed a slight pause in Civilise's conversation with the Russian, and deliberately broke in.

"The entrée has come and gone," he observed, "and I am still here. Aren't you going to speak to me at all?"

The foreigner smiled resigned acquiescence at the loss of his prize, and immediately turned to Miss Spain, who looked bored under the affliction. She spoke little French. Her specialty was breeding dogs, on which subject she was rather brilliant.

"Well, what shall I say?" Civilise demanded rather rudely.

"What were you talking about?" retorted Severance. "I can be just as interesting as M. What's-His-Name."

"We were talking about the economic situation in Bessarabia."

"I'm glad I rescued you, then," continued Severance. "You ought to thank me, instead of being rude. Say, that dress is a corker!"

"You're wondering where I got the money to pay for it," said Civilise darkly. "It's none of your business, but I won a thousand at bridge last month."

"A thousand! My God, Civvy, who carries you when you lose?"

"Ed Hodenpyl." She glanced defiantly down the table toward the handsome, florid man. "Why shouldn't he? I don't set him back much. My game is improving."

"I didn't ask you why he shouldn't," answered Severance gravely. "It's all right with me. You're the keeper of your soul."

Civilise laughed—bitterly, he thought.

"Women haven't any souls—only bodies, and sometimes—"

The sentence died. Severance had a flash of inspiration.

"And sometimes hearts," he finished for her. "Hitting the high spots, aren't you, Civvy?" he asked quite gently.

The butler presented a dish. The girl stared at it, without making the slightest effort to accept or reject what was offered. Finally the man patiently withdrew it. Severance could imagine her eyes filled with tears.

"Who cares?" she asked at last, in a low voice, and turned to the Russian for relief.

But the Russian evidently knew something about dogs, and Miss Spain was delighted. There was no help there.

"I don't think Alan would be any too happy about it," the fat man continued inexorably. "Do you?"

For the second time the girl's cheeks paled until the rouge stood out glaringly, but her eyes were blazing with rage when she lifted them to Jack's face.

"You are absolutely indecent! There are limits to which I will not permit even you to go, Jack Severance!"

"I—I am sorry," he faltered, embarrassed at her stark anger. "You see, I thought—"

"There is absolutely nothing to think," declared Civilise coldly. "What I did was the best thing for Alan—and for me."

Again Severance had an odd flash of inspiration, but he was interrupted before he could put it into words. Nina Crawford was gathering the women together with a commanding eye. There was a scraping of chairs, and then a general movement toward the door.

"We'll give you just twenty minutes," she told the men. "More people are coming, and dancing begins promptly at ten o'clock."

Hodenpyl walked over to Civilise as she passed, and spoke to her, his voice lowered intimately; but the girl shook her head and walked on without replying. The man frowned slightly, but his eyes caressed her white back as she disappeared. Severance, watching, had a moment of nausea.

It was nearly midnight when he found himself again with Civilise. The orchestra had been blaring away, and couples were swaying to and fro in the rooms opening into one another, intoxicated with the rhythm. At intervals the servants brought in fresh bowls of punch, with smooth lumps of orange ice floating in it. Girls laughed flutteringly; the men were becoming more ardent.

Nina, an elfin brown figure in garish yellow, was indefatigable. Red-faced Gideon Crawford had gone peacefully to sleep on a sofa in another room.

Civilise had disappeared, and with her Hodenpyl. Severance danced at intervals, but always he watched the doors opening out to the veranda. The two were not in the lower part of the house—of that he had made certain. It was none of his business, he reflected. Idiot girls had ruined

the lives of good men before, and idiot men had ruined the lives of good girls. It was all in the game, and he should have acquired enough sophistication to view it with bland disinterest.

No, it was none of his business—except for a certain night, the debt of which he could not pay, the interest on which he might at least attempt to keep up. His mind flashed back to the darkness of another year and the futile attack on Noisy le Sec—that horrible little French town smashed flat on a hilltop, and commanded by the German machine guns. There Alan had brought him back, wounded; carrying him, dragging him, stumbling, falling, getting through somehow to the dressing station and safety.

"He couldn't do it now," thought Severance with a grin, while his heart swelled at the memory. "I'm too fat!"

Civilise and Hodenpyl suddenly appeared in the door, and Severance, seeking determination, crossed over to them. The man was frowning heavily now. The girl seemed worn, and her shoulders sank in lassitude.

"I thought you were never coming," said Jack brightly, as he reached them. "This is my dance, and we've already missed part of it."

Hodenpyl glanced uncertainly at the girl, and then back at Severance.

"I didn't know it was your dance," he muttered.

Civilise half raised her hand, as if in protest.

"There's a lot you don't know!" retorted Jack, as he swept the girl into his arms before she could speak.

They were in the middle of the floor before the angry Hodenpyl could think of a fitting answer.

"Wouldn't you like to sit this out with me?" Jack asked, when they were safely in a corner. "I want to say something to you."

"This isn't your dance, and I don't want to hear what you have to say. You've ruined one of the nicest parties of the season for me," answered Civilise, but she spoke without spirit.

Severance sighed.

"I'll have to tell you here, then, and you won't like it. Alan is very ill. I thought you ought to know."

She stiffened in his arms, as if he had struck her.

"Alan ill!" she murmured, and became inarticulate, her face close against Jack's shoulder.

The man felt a flush of triumph, as at a game hardly won.

"Not dying," he assured her hastily. "Nothing like that; but he broke his leg on the mountain, and then the old malarial fever he contracted in the trenches got him again. He'll be all right, probably, but he's lost about thirty pounds—mere skin and bones."

Jack shook his head sadly. Civilise's feet had been moving automatically. Now, by a gallant effort, she regained control of herself.

"I'm glad it's no worse," she said, in a voice that she tried to make casual. "I do hope Mme. Downes will take good care of him!"

"His mother?" Severance stopped dancing, staring down at her in absolute bewilderment. "Why, I thought you knew! She left the same day you did."

"Left?"

The girl was incredulous. They stood there, pressed together, the music forgotten, couples circling and bumping them. Severance recovered his presence of mind enough to draw her to a sofa pushed back against the wall.

"We'd better talk," he muttered.

Civilise did not hear him.

"Left?" she repeated, as if dazed.

"Why, what did she leave for? Where did she go?"

"Well, I can't tell you exactly," Severance answered her. "Alan wrote—told me, that is—that she had gone back to France. I'm afraid you'll have to fill in the details," he added apologetically. "Alan has never talked much about his mother. I gathered that she did not find the mountains pleasant, any more than—"

"Lochinvar!" muttered the girl inconsequentially. Then she realized what Severance was saying. "Did he tell you I didn't want to stay?" she demanded.

Severance wiped his forehead, for it was wet with perspiration.

"Well, he gave me to understand—I thought—you didn't want to, did you?" he countered.

"Certainly I wanted to stay!" she cried. "I only left because the three of us were not getting along well together. His mother was always finding fault—bickering—and Alan did not seem to care. His work was

being ruined. How could he work when she was always complaining?"

She stared up at Jack, demanding an answer.

"It does seem rather hard," the man admitted; "but you wanted to go, didn't you? Alan said something about hell in a hut."

"Yes, that's what it was. I couldn't stand it any more—the heat, and that fat old woman always rocking, rocking, and her silly French songs. Of course, I tried to make him think I wanted to go. Why not? It made it easier for him. He couldn't very well put his mother out, could he? Besides, I thought that if he really cared he would come after me. Oh, I don't know what I thought!"

She broke off, distraught, her hands twisting in her lap.

"You made a bad mistake," Severance answered quietly. "He cared—too much. Apparently you don't know Alan. He takes things absolutely at their face value, and you were evidently convincing. Whether he would come trailing after you to bring you back, I don't know; but you couldn't expect a man down with a fever like his to do much trailing. I think you were playing a very dangerous game, Civilise, and showing very little patience."

Civilise's head drooped lower, and her eyes closed.

"I know it now," she answered in a small voice. "Take me out of here, Jack. I'm—I'm crying!"

There was a French window behind them. Severance pushed it open, and together they stepped out on the veranda. For a time they were silent.

"I've been a fool!" she said, at length. "I've been a blind fool! I've hated it every minute I've been away. I'm not mean enough to play this game, Jack, but I wasn't big enough to stop it. I ran off to the only thing I knew; but now—I'm going back. I don't know whether he wants me, but I'm going back to see!"

In the darkness the man breathed a sigh of relief.

"Interest to date, I think!" he muttered.

The girl was talking on eagerly, appealing to him.

"Whether he wants me or not, he needs me. He's such a child, Jack! You don't know. If his painting goes wrong, he needs encouragement. If it goes right, he needs praise. He's so helpless about simple things

like food and clothes—he forgets them. He'd starve himself when he's working, if somebody—" She broke off. "Who's taking care of him now?"

"The people across the way, I believe—a farmer and his wife."

Civilise shivered in disgust.

"Those shiftless things! He can't get well with them. Jack, I'm going back now!"

Severance looked at his watch.

"I'd wait till morning," he advised dryly. "It's nearly one o'clock. You always were impulsive, Civilise!"

XI

THE storm clouds which had been threatening all evening, hanging low over the twin hills—Sheba's Breasts—and filled with sullen rumbling, suddenly burst, seeming to be torn asunder by the sudden wind rushing down from the mountains. The rain, in inky walls of driving water, swept over the countryside, blotting out the dim night landscape, obliterating roads and making trees and barns formless masses, blacker than the darkness enveloping them. The trout brook behind the old gray farmhouse rose steadily, the waves of it, no longer ripples, eating insidiously at the overhanging banks.

In the front room of the house Alan Downes lit another lamp and continued his gloomy contemplation of the canvases which he had placed about the walls. His "show" was ready, but now that his work was done it did not seem very satisfactory. He wondered if, after all, he would send his pictures to the gallery which had promised him a week for their display. What was the use?

The man limped slightly as he walked, and his face had fallen into gray hollows, the skin drawn tight across the temples. In his eyes was the light of a recurrent evening fever. He seemed slier, and bent somehow, as if under the burden of a vague lassitude.

Before the picture of a pretty girl dressed in gingham, standing against a background of pale green, he paused for a long time, studying the face intently. Then he deliberately turned it to the wall.

"It wouldn't fit in, anyway," he muttered.

The dog by the fireplace roused from his sleep and growled sharply. Alan turned to him.

"Shut up, Beast," he commanded.

But the animal did not quiet. He rose slowly to his feet, his hair bristling, and walked to the door. Outside the storm clamored. Again Alan spoke to the dog impatiently.

"Down, there! It's nothing."

The Beast growled again, with a note of warning, and flung himself furiously against the door. The knob of it moved slightly, as if some one without, exhausted, were trying to turn it. Alan stepped quickly across the room and threw the door open.

In the rush of wind which extinguished one of the lamps he saw Civilise outlined against the blackness—dripping, her hat gone, her clothes clinging to her body. She leaned against the door, her breath coming in gasps.

Alan Downes stared, astounded. The dog without hesitation threw himself upon the girl, his short, frenzied barks clattering out into the night.

"Well!" said Civilise, at last. "Can't I come in?"

Her face, upturned to her husband, had a faint, tremulous smile.

Alan Downes caught her in his arms and pushed the door to.

"You've come!" he cried, heedless of her wetness. "You've come!"

Civilise wiped her wet face against the shoulder of his coat. Then she raised her arms about his neck and kissed him.

"Not quite as I intended to," she answered, when he would let her. "I forgot about the fall schedule, and had to walk up from the junction. Nice weather you provide in these parts, sir!" Then her jauntiness fell from her. "Alan," she said softly, "I've come back again—if you want me—to the hut!"

His lips against her mouth silenced her.

Civilise had changed her clothes, and Alan was preparing hot coffee. She sat watching him, an old blanket wrapped about her feet, slowly regaining her strength.

"You limp, but you don't walk as if you had broken your leg," she observed. "I was terribly worried!"

Alan paused before the range.

"Why, I haven't broken my leg. I turned my ankle—that's all."

A strange look came into Civilise's eyes.

"Jack, what a gorgeous liar you are!" she murmured.

Alan smiled happily at her.

"What did you say about Jack?" he asked.

"I said," she answered, "that when he was here he found you down with fever and a broken leg."

"Fever, all right—the old intermittent thing; but my ankle was only turned. He wasn't here, anyway. I wouldn't have him—put him off and wrote him a letter. The man must be crazy!"

"Not crazy!" Civilise shook her head. "Very wise—even when he takes chances!"

Alan was completely happy again.

"Well, it's Greek to me. We'll ask him to explain some time. Civvy, dear, I had a cable from mother yesterday. Another mystery! Here's the letter she left when she went away."

He went to the desk and returned with the two slips of paper. Civilise read the letter first, and then she opened the cable dispatch.

Met Lochinvar in Paris by accident. Russian gone. Married yesterday. He does not deserve it.

MOTHER.

"Not quite clear, is it?" said Alan, as she finished. "Of course, she went over

THE END

there to meet him, and here she says 'by accident'—and so much later! I'm glad, though, that he has done the decent thing at last."

Civilise's eyes clouded.

"I think," she murmured, "that she really left for the same reason I did. Brave old *madame*!"

"Perhaps you are right, dear," agreed her husband. "But please drink your coffee while it's hot," he added. "I don't want you to catch cold."

Civilise tasted it, and choked.

"Horrible! It's lucky I came back. Already I'm a better cook than you are. Tell me about the show, Alan. Are you ready for it?"

Alan's face fell.

"It 'll probably be an awful failure, and I'm afraid we'll have to stay in this hut for ages. The work didn't go well after you left, Civvy."

Civilise put down her cup.

"Come here and kiss me," she commanded. "You old silly! It will probably be a big success. Even if it isn't, I want to stay in this hut for ages—with you!"

THE WISH

How I should love to roam again
Along the road where the river flows
Between the tall tobacco rows
And the reaches of golden grain!

How I should love to feel the wind
Fresh on my face, and catch the glint
Of sun on the water, and glimpse a hint
Of the mountain slopes behind!

How I should love to sense the scent
Of the blossoms bowering the cottage doors,
And see the silvering sycamores
Under the hills of Kent!

And how I should love to hear the weir
Sing to the leaning reeds until
There came the plaint of the whippoorwill,
Poignant and lone and clear!

Under the hills of Kent afar,
Oh, to be there, my sweet, with you,
At the fall of the dusk, in the cool of the dew,
Watching the vesper star!

Clinton Scollard

The Doukhobor Woman

THE ROMANCE OF A MAN AND A GIRL WHO CAME FROM
TWO DIFFERENT WORLDS

By Horace Howard Herr

IT was haying time in Swan River Valley, and the Doukhobor peasants were making the most of an ideal Canadian August. Ekatrina trampled down the sweetly odored grass on a stack ready for topping. Father Sherbinin and his wife, at the base of the stack, were collecting the wisps of hay that had fallen from the cart, while young Ivan watered the oxen before driving them afield for another load.

From her vantage, Ekatrina could see the road leading down from the big timber to the Swan River ford. A man walked unsteadily in the road where it dipped to meet the river. Even at a distance his dress marked him an alien, and the young woman watched with feminine interest as the stranger hesitantly waded into the fast-flowing stream.

It was a treacherous ford. Knowing that unless the man turned sharply upstream he would step from a hidden ledge into deep water, Ekatrina shouted lustily; but she attracted only the attention of her parents, who looked up at her in surprise and wanted to know what it was about.

Her frantically waving arms were of no avail in arresting the stranger's attention. As she fully expected, he had not yet reached the middle of the stream when he stepped into water both deep and swift.

Sliding down the stack, her feet striking Father Sherbinin and knocking him to the ground breathless and astonished, Ekatrina started across the field toward the river, discarding her outer garments as she ran. Delayed by a second fall, caused by tripping on a fork handle, Father Sherbinin arrived at the river to see Ekatrina fighting her way to the bank, dragging a limp body.

By the time Father Sherbinin had pulled the unconscious man from the river, and Ekatrina, exhausted by her run across the

field and her desperate efforts in the water, had crawled up the bank, Mother Sherbinin arrived, fetching with her the girl's head shawl and blouse. While the mother looked after her daughter, the father worked over the limp body of the stranger.

When Father Sherbinin was sure that life remained in the body, he picked it up and put it over his shoulder, with no more effort than if he had been handling a sack of wheat, and made his way across the field to the house. Here Mother Sherbinin prepared the alcove bed, while Ekatrina, swishing about in her wet clothes, heated a stone to be placed at the patient's feet.

Father Sherbinin stripped the stranger of his water-soaked garments, and experienced a measure of surprise when he found, next to the man's flesh, a heavy leather belt. He unfastened it and tossed it aside on the floor. There was a metallic jingle as it struck. One of several pockets opened, and gold coins rolled out.

Later, when Herman Manwell, but half conscious, felt for his money belt, it was gone.

For a few moments, a feeling of relief added to the unnatural lassitude of his mind and body. The torture at his waist, which had been to him as the vulture to Prometheus, had vanished. His dull mind rejoiced, and, at the same time, entertained a ghost of protest.

Presently his hands again felt for the belt, and the caution which had come to be a part of even his subconscious self asserted itself. He raised himself on his elbow, looking about wildly, until his eyes rested on the window ledge, where the belt had been placed to dry. Its pockets had been opened, and the late sun was shining on gold pieces and bills.

That was a strange circumstance! For

how many ages he had protected his treasure from the light! How he had dreaded the time when the belt and its contents would be brought out into the sun!

Manwell stared for a moment, his features unpleasantly twisted with consternation; but gradually the lines in his face softened. When his spent strength no longer would sustain him, and he dropped back on his pillow, a smile lingered about his lips.

Some one was moving about in the next room. Manwell heard the sound, and his smile vanished. His habitual mask of immobility returned. A moment later a bearded man with singularly tranquil eyes was bending over the bed.

"Ah, you are awake! For the living, it is always to eat."

The bearded patriarch waited for no reply, but withdrew, leaving Manwell in extreme perplexity. The light of day bathing the belt and the money! The clean, bare room! The warm, comfortable bed! The bearded man! How strange and how baffling!

Then came Ekatrina with a bowl of steaming gruel. She stood beside the bed, the flush on her face deepening as she met her patient's questioning stare; but she stimulated Manwell's confused wits. He remembered.

Even when he was struggling in deep, swift water, unable to swim a stroke, he wanted to laugh at the comedy in the picture of a woman running across a field, disrobing as she ran. How recklessly she plunged head foremost from the bank! How she puffed out her cheeks as she came through the water toward him! This was the same face he had seen just before everything had gone black, only the cheeks were redder, and not puffed out like little balloons.

Manwell remembered. He had been drowning. Evidently this woman had saved him. Perhaps she ought not to have done that, but how was she to know about the belt and the money which, until now, had not seen the light of the sun?

"You have saved a very miserable life," he said feebly.

Ekatrina shook her head. Her cheeks were two flames of crimson now. The stranger was very different from the men of the village. The indelible stamp of culture was on his face. Even the unsophisticated feminine mind pays unconscious

homage to a superior presence, though the expression of that homage may be no more than accentuated awkwardness or a more intense timidity.

Awkwardly the young woman bent over to place the bowl of gruel on the bed. Realizing that she had not understood his words, and feeling that it was imperative to express his gratitude—even though the gratitude was more feigned than real—Manwell took one of her hands and pressed it to his lips.

The bowl crashing to the floor and the hot gruel spilling about her bare feet, causing her to stand first on one foot and then the other, somewhat marred Ekatrina's enjoyment of her first deep emotion.

Manwell lacked the mental determination essential to a speedy convalescence. There was no spiritual urge, no ambition awaiting realization, no unfinished business promising a profit, no duty to command him, no pleasure to allure. In a singularly turbulent stream of life, he had been caught in an eddy. The still water, the cool shade, and the seclusion it vouchsafed made of the past a melancholy mist, and of the future an ominous mirage. It was as if he had eaten of the lotus plant. What had been became meaningless, and what was yet to be seemed purposeless.

Father and Mother Sherbinin were not disposed to complain if Providence burdened them with a sick man. If Ekatrina had analyzed her feelings about it, she might have discovered an inchoate complaint, not that Providence had sent this man from the world beyond the big timber, but that he did not speak Russian.

Intelligence and imagination had persisted through the girl's peasant lineage. She was quick to realize that the stranger was superior to the stolid, patient men of the village. If her imagination was stimulated by this circumstance, there was involved no impeachment of her modesty or the rectitude of her dreaming, for every *Cinderella* has her *Prince Charming*.

Manwell's convalescence seemed to depend upon his mind, rather than his body. The sight of his belt and its contents exposed to the glare of the sun had a singular effect on him. He was experiencing the mental analogy of a vicious boil, slowly gathering its corruption to a head and finally breaking, to the great relief of its victim.

What a satisfaction to have his loins free from the weight of the belt! What inex-

pressible relief to see that the sun touched the gold and the bills without changing them into accusing witnesses to his part in deeds better left in darkness! What pleasant peace, indeed, what miraculous contentment, to see the belt and the money lying there on the window ledge, open to the gaze of whoever might care to look, and none even curious about it!

Two days after he found himself resting in the alcove bed, Manwell was physically fit to resume his journey and to take up his burden—even though the journey might be an endless one, while the burden was a money belt filled with a treasure inconceivably heavy because of the somber recollection it inspired; but mentally he was not at all fit.

Plain, honest people, a little world where there was no strife for wealth, a peaceful valley, an animated picture of unsophisticated domesticity; a little domain where, if joys were not irresistibly buoyant so that they led to song, sorrows were not so heavy that they pressed out tears—these held Manwell's mind enslaved as if they had Circe's magic.

It is not the fashion or the faith of a Doukhobor to ask the stranger whence he comes or whither he goes. Where necessities of life are common property, and no man seeks more than that which will adequately serve his needs, the presence of one more man is of no moment. After a few days, Manwell went afieid. In time he went to the meetinghouse. The villagers accepted him as a fixture.

In the beginning, Ekatrina and Manwell spoke to each other with their eyes. Then the man picked up a few words of Russian and the girl picked up words of English. The girl learned faster than the man. By the time Manwell had grown a beard, Ekatrina's English vocabulary had increased remarkably, and her eyes had become increasingly eloquent.

Having come from a world which is prone to attach some importance to the glances from a woman's eyes, Manwell was quick to sense the fact that when Ekatrina looked at him, she saw more than a stranger within the gate. At first he was amused, but his amusement soon gave place to distress. There was enough trouble and tragedy in the world without a simple peasant girl discovering that her prince was but a puppet. The thing to do was to pass on and leave the girl unhurt to enjoy the fame

of her prowess in the hay field, to marry a stolid, bearded swain, and to become the mother of his children.

But Manwell delayed his going. Why deny himself a day, a week, a month more of this peace? Pass on? To where? To what? Before he could pass on he would have to pick up the belt and the money, and as soon as he picked up the belt and the money he would have to conceal it from the sun and from the gaze of curious men. How much better to permit the belt and the money to remain on Father Sherbinin's window ledge, in the sun!

Ekatrina's eyes became more eloquent, and her English vocabulary enlarged. Culture is not essential to a woman's cunning, nor does ignorance impair her native wit. More often culture shames into repression and renunciation the natural sentiment of a woman's heart. It pelts poor, honest passion with such sophistries as, "He is below your social level," or, "He is intellectually inferior," or, "Your social set never would accept him." Ignorance does not know that society legislates for love, and inexorably exacts the stipulated penalty when love ignores the social statutes.

There was Nordic blood in Ekatrina's veins. When the Varangians came to rule the Slavs of Novgorod, more than a thousand years before she was born, it was written that the blood of conquest should surge through her veins. She dreamed of possessing this man—this being from another world—and when a woman dreams of possession, she will find a way.

Manwell did not pass on. The increasing eloquence of Ekatrina's eyes and her broken English no longer amused him. He was not distressed when she was near. When he looked at her face, he saw less of her sunburned complexion and more of the blush that mounted to her cheeks. He began to marvel at the strong lines of her body and her wealth of chestnut hair. Her small feet, so often bare, began to interest him. In time Father and Mother Sherbinin wagged their heads knowingly and frequently talked in guarded tones.

When Manwell had been in Father Sherbinin's household a month, the stranger sought an occasion for a private talk with the Russian peasant. They talked often, Sherbinin being one of several peasants who spoke English fluently, but always others were near. Sometimes the conversation would be about Peter Verigin, the

great leader of the Doukhobors. Frequently Father Sherbinin's words had a religious pitch. He extolled the principle of non-resistance. He pointed out how the communistic order practiced by his people weaned men from greed and envy, and left their minds free for reflection on spiritual matters.

One evening, because of Manwell's adroitness in directing, Father Sherbinin talked of his life in the Caucasus, of the decree of conscription of 1887, and how he had been flogged and left for dead because of his open hostility to the authorities.

In all these conversations, two chief features impressed Manwell. One was the indisputable sincerity of the Doukhobor in his profession of faith in the literal words of Christ. "Thou shalt not kill," was a command meaning just what it said. "Thou shalt not kill except by order of the government," was a man-made heresy.

The other feature was the Doukhobor's frank distrust of all agents of the law. It was evident that his religious convictions imposed on the Doukhobor the obligation of loving his neighbor as himself, with an honest tongue in his head for all men; but no violence was done to the tenets of his faith if he spoke to an officer of the law, or an agent of the government, with mental reservations, or in words which had a double meaning.

These two characteristics, common to the Doukhobor peasants, held a singular interest for Manwell. Men and women who believed that Christ meant just what he said, might logically be expected to refrain from judging past deeds harshly. Here, if anywhere, he might expect to be accepted on a plane of equality, regardless of what had transpired beyond the big timber. Here, also, there would be no disposition to welcome or aid a representative of the law.

These two facts were carefully weighed before Manwell sought occasion for a private talk with Father Sherbinin. The other facts developed from the eloquence of Ekatrina's eyes, and out of the intimacies of life in the Sherbinin household.

The house, built of spruce logs, and thatched with sod, was not large. Within were the bare, clean front room, with an alcove and a built-in bed; the equally clean kitchen, with its fireplace; and the middle room, with two homemade beds, with ropes strung back and forth from the side boards

in lieu of springs, and straw-filled mattresses. One bed was for Ekatrina, the other for young Ivan. Between the two was a light cloth curtain, strung on a cord, so that it could be run back to the wall during the day.

Obviously, a stranger within the gate must have a bed, and the arrangement which least disturbed the household was to assign Manwell to share young Ivan's. In a more meticulous society the arrangement might have been open to censure, but these were stolid peasants, living close to the earth and near to nature. They had not advanced to that stage in social relations where the natural is considered immoral, and modesty often becomes the cloak of the harlot-hearted.

Not once, but almost daily, Manwell had glimpses of Ekatrina in various stages of negligee. It had always been thus in the household. Neither Ekatrina nor any one else thought anything of it. Her training was that of a Russian peasant girl and a Doukhobor. There had been a time when a great number of the Doukhobors started out in a religious frenzy to meet Christ. In order that their bodies should not be contaminated by man-made garments, they had started out naked—men and women as nude as were Adam and Eve in the sinless days of the Garden of Eden.

Ekatrina, like many another girl in the village, often took her swim in Swan River, stripping down to her satin skin. If there were men in the neighboring field, or if they chanced to pass along the river path, neither she nor they gave the matter a second thought.

But Manwell's training was different. He was a normal man in an abnormal state of mind. When ambition, social station, and love come down in ruins about one's ears, one is very likely to arrive at a state of mind in which one finds it difficult to refrain from snatching any passing joy or satisfaction that offers. Ekatrina's eyes were eloquent, her body was a thing of beauty. Manwell sought a private talk with Sherbinin.

II

FATHER SHERBININ was one of the leaders of a persecuted people. Before the great migration to the promised land in Canada, he had seen his brethren stricken down with the Cossack's whip, he had seen them plundered by tax collectors, he had

seen the women outraged by the Czar's soldiers. Government, to him, was a plague and a misfortune, the refuge of robbers and the defense of the ungodly. It had exiled Doukhobors by the thousands and killed them by the hundreds, only because they insisted that a man's conscience is God's voice, and that God's voice is more to be respected than priests who bow to icons and Czars who command their subjects to kill and murder.

If Herman Manwell had comprehended the profound distrust entertained by these Russian peasants for all government and all man-made laws, he would have been less disposed to temporize with his impulse to have a frank talk with Father Sherbinin.

Manwell was neither a renegade nor a charlatan. His philosophy was far from being one of moral irresponsibility. The conquest of a simple peasant girl was not the sort of an adventure he would undertake in a spirit of wantonness. It was with something very much like horror, one night, that he awoke to the fact that Ekaterina might not be quite safe with him. The realization that he might not be able to withstand temptation inspired the resolve to remove himself from his temptress.

The summer green of the valley had yielded to autumn brown, however, before Manwell's idea of having a frank talk with Father Sherbinin crystallized into action. As spokesman for the village, the bearded peasant had to go to the village of Swan River, to see the government land commissioner about matters of some importance to the Doukhobor community. This involved either a walk of ten miles to the railroad station or a ride in a springless wagon behind plodding oxen. The oxen were needed for getting out logs for Brother Glagosky's house. Father Sherbinin would walk.

"I will walk part of the way with you," Manwell said, when he sat with his host in the kitchen the night before Sherbinin was to set out.

The peasant carefully waxed the end of the heavy thread he was using in mending his boots, and then looked searchingly into the face of the stranger within his gate.

"The Evil One calls when we are least prepared to resist," he remarked.

"Quite true," Manwell replied, wondering if the shrewd father could suspect how singularly pertinent his words were. "If you mean that I may be yielding to a de-

sire to return to my former life, be at peace. I shall not go as far as the village. We will talk for a season. It will make the miles shorter for you."

"The longest mile is too short," said Sherbinin, "when one travels toward a government agent, and the shortest mile is too long when one is returning."

"Unless you forbid it, I will go part way with you."

"I have no power to forbid any one the highway."

"And you will listen to what I have to say?"

"As long as it is godly and worthy the ears of honest men."

Early the next morning the two men started off across the frost-whitened field to the ford. Removing their boots, they waded across through ice-cold water. While they sat on the gravelly bank and put on their boots, Manwell made his first attempt to tell Father Sherbinin something about the past life of this stranger whom the peasant had taken into his household without a question.

"Brother Sherbinin, you are a good and just man, with the wisdom of experience. I must tell you something unpleasant—something which may cause you to repent of your hospitality to a stranger."

"If I am good and just, it is only as I obey the voice of the Spirit within me. Goodness and justice rule all those in whom Christ is risen," the bearded peasant said, by way of protest against accepting credit which, in all sincerity, he felt did not belong to him.

"Have you never wondered as to my former life? There is a great deal of money in the belt on your window ledge."

"What you have been does not interest me," replied Sherbinin, as he gave a final tug on his boot straps and stood up, stamping his feet on the ground. "Money is the device of the devil. It is the measure of men's dishonesty—"

"So it is, perhaps," Manwell interrupted, as he rose, and the two men started up the road toward the timber; "and I am surprised that you should have taken into your house, and treated as a brother, a man who came to you bearing so much evidence of so great dishonesty."

"It is not for me to question the ways of the Lord. He may send to me whom He will, but I pray earnestly that he may not send government men."

"I may not have been as dishonest as the possession of so much money would lead you to suspect," Manwell said. "It is, as you say, evil money, but I have not touched a dollar of it. Did you ever perplex yourself with the question of whether or not a man can be honestly dishonest?"

"You speak in riddles, Brother Manwell. It is surely a virtue to cheat the devil and his agents. Is that an answer to your question?"

"Is it a virtue to stand by a friend, to protect one who has been kind and generous?" asked Manwell.

"It is not for me to judge any man. The voice of the Spirit within you will judge, and no man needs to tell you whether or not you have sinned."

"My heart is heavy, but my conscience is clear. While I cannot tell you all, I want to tell you enough of my misfortune so you will know the manner of man you have befriended. I was—"

Father Sherbinin held up his hand.

"I do not want to hear that which has nothing to do with me. What has gone before, like what is to come hereafter, is a matter between you and the Spirit. When Christ is risen, there is a new man. The old man is dead, and I am not the person to disturb the dead."

"But you wrong me—I am not a thief, Brother Sherbinin!"

"Whoever withholds from the Lord what is his is a thief," the peasant said quickly.

Manwell realized that Father Sherbinin would have none of his story, even though that story might be essential to an understanding of the second proposition which the perplexed man wished to submit to the peasant. The two men walked along the road in silence for a mile or more before Manwell had the courage to begin again.

"Your household is crowded, Brother Sherbinin," he said. "Perhaps it would be better if I found lodging with some one else."

"It is no more crowded than it was a month back," replied the peasant, looking sharply at Manwell.

"True, but am I always to burden you? I have imposed on you too long as it is. Winter is near, and we must be much in the house. I thought perhaps it would be easier for you if I found a place elsewhere in the village."

"Then you will pass the winter among us?" Sherbinin asked.

"If you would listen to what I am willing to tell you about the money, perhaps you would agree that it would be better for me to remain for the winter, but not in your house."

"I do not have to know what has been, to say that it is better for you to stay with us for the winter. It is always good for a man to get away from the ways of the wicked. Sometimes I have felt that you would join us, and we would build yet another house, as we are building for Brother Glagosky."

"That may happen," Manwell said, his voice colorless, as if it echoed a thought which was not yet crystallized; "but before it can happen, I must tell who I am and what I have been."

"Rather, you must say that the past is dead. Come, we are talking with serpent tongues. If you are to remain with us, why do you wish to leave my house? If you cannot answer, I can answer for you. It is because of Ekatrina—is it not so?"

"You are right, Father Sherbinin! I am a man from another world—"

"An exile, maybe," Sherbinin interrupted, "driven out by laws made to confound honest peasants. The question is, will you return to that other world, or will you forget the torments of striving for money and the vanities of possession, and give the Spirit within you a chance?"

"But you would not want Ekatrina to marry a man unworthy, one who—"

"Ekatrina is a woman. It is not what I may want. It is never so with a woman. If her heart is set on the devil, she would listen to no advice. I have observed that her eyes are on you often. She is a woman, and no man understands a woman. When they seem evil, they are apt to be good; when they seem good, they are apt to be evil. Ekatrina has been an honor to me. She has been slow to awaken to the call of nature, but she dreams now. You are not blind, and you know she dreams with her eyes on you."

Manwell was silent. He could think of no way to say to the man, without being insultingly frank, that carnal temptation might prove irresistible. While he vainly sought soft words to express a hard fact, Father Sherbinin continued:

"Be sure you are not fighting against the impulses of the Spirit. Go from my house or stay—that is with you; but there is peace with us, and, if you would share

it, it is but natural that you should have a house of your own and take a wife."

"You would understand, if only you would listen to me. Would you have a daughter married to a man who has been called a thief?"

"I have heard no one call you a thief, and I do not want to hear anything from the world that is against Christ."

"Then I shall return to your house, take my money from your window ledge, and be gone!" Manwell said with some heat.

"You had better leave the tokens of the devil where they are, and remain with godly brethren, where you will have no need to soil your soul with thoughts of corrupting things."

Manwell stopped in the road, but Sherbinin went on. Seeing that the peasant did not intend to look back, Manwell called to him:

"Brother Sherbinin, may I leave some money to compensate you for your great kindness?"

The peasant did not reply, but went his way.

Manwell turned back toward the village. He walked slowly, debating his future course of action. It seemed foolish to travel two thousand miles with the fixed intention of losing himself in a Doukhobor village, only to desert it at a time when it began to accept him as a fixture.

Was it, after all, so important to tell Father Sherbinin about the belt and the money? Indeed, was there any occasion to resist the appeal made to him by a peasant girl, even though that appeal was to his senses? Why not yield to the current of circumstances and let it bear him where it might, since there could be no return to that other world, in which he had had his dream and had been stricken down in the midst of it by disaster?

III

MANWELL had been walking slowly. Frequently he stood still. Concentrated on his perplexities, he did not observe Ekaterina until she stood before him, breathless from running. He looked up, startled, his face revealing his astonishment.

"I run fast," Ekaterina said in her broken English, "to make it far to walk back!"

Her face was flushed, and her full bosom rose and fell with her heavy breathing. She was barefooted, and had taken the shawl from her head. As she turned to

walk with Manwell, she shook out her hair, a great mop of it, reaching well below her waist. For the first time Manwell noticed a golden sheen in it as the early morning sun touched her head.

He was wondering what the artifices of Fifth Avenue might work in the way of transformation in the girl, when she looked at him, and, with no attempt to hide her anxiety, said:

"It is afraid you went away for not to come back!"

"No," Manwell assured her. "I was walking with your father to discuss—"

"This discuss, it is mean what?"

"Talk. I was talking with your father."

"What is you call this?" Ekaterina asked, as she picked up a golden brown leaf.

"It is a leaf."

"It is a leaf!" Ekaterina repeated, with careful emphasis on each word.

A stone, a bush, a bird, a fence, her shawl, her skirt, Manwell's coat, the buttons on it, this, that everything along the road furnished the excuse for the question:

"What is you call this?"

Her lesson in English was quite enough to make Ekaterina happy along the road to the village. When they came to the ford, Manwell removed his boots and rolled his trouser legs well above his knees, while Ekaterina gathered up her skirt.

"Too cold to swim for you—hold I you hand!" she exclaimed.

Holding up her skirt with one hand, she extended the other to Manwell, laughing at what she meant to be a joke. Hand in hand they waded through the shallow water, making the necessary detour upstream to avoid the deep hole that nearly cost Manwell his life.

When they were no more than twenty feet from the bank, Ekaterina stepped on a slippery stone, and would have fallen if Manwell had not caught her as she staggered against him. As it was, she went to her knees, and Manwell practically lifted her to her feet again.

It was just a little strange, perhaps, that she had turned about as she was falling, so that she faced Manwell. As he bent down to get a firmer hold beneath her arms, she looked up at him and laughed. Manwell laughed, too, as he raised her from the water. Her hair blew about his face, and, for an instant only, his cheek touched hers. They were slow to release their hold on each other.

When they had reached the bank, Manwell sought a stone on which to sit while he rolled down his thoroughly soaked trouser legs. It was only then the two realized that the comedy—or was it tragedy?—had cost a pair of boots, the like of which Brother Radovovick, the most expert cobbler in the settlement, could not make in three days.

With their wet garments clinging to their limbs, the pair walked briskly along the road to the house, where Mother Sherbinin, just ready to go to the shed to beat out some flax, laughed at their misfortune, even while mildly chiding Ekatrina for her carelessness.

Ekatrina's mother spoke no English. In their native tongue she told her daughter that there was much work to be done in the flax shed, and that she should come and help as soon as she had changed to dry clothing. With that Mother Sherbinin went out, and, calling young Ivan from his work of building a bird house, the two went toward the long, low shed, some three hundred yards afield, in which was stored the community flax harvest.

Ekatrina raked together the embers on the hearth and put a stick of wood on them. She then went to a chest in the middle room and took from it a pair of old boots. They were Father Sherbinin's old boots, much worn, and several sizes too large for Manwell. Ekatrina held them alongside one of Manwell's feet, and laughed at the disparity.

"Woman's foot, it is too little!" she exclaimed.

Again she went to the middle room, to bring Manwell another pair of trousers. They were the trousers he was wearing when Ekatrina pulled him from the river.

"You by the hot fire," she said, "not to get sick!"

Into these civilities she put a proprietary air. It was as if she were taking good care of something that was her own valued possession. To this sort of coddling man is singularly susceptible, the girl's ministrations pleased Manwell.

Ekatrina returned to the middle room, removed her soaked garments, slipped into a linsey gown—which, if it had had a few buttons on the front of it, would have passed as a linen duster—and, wrapping the garment about her, returned to the kitchen to spread out her water-soaked clothes before the fire.

Manwell, having changed to his dry trousers, was seated on the bench, with his bare feet stretched out to the warming blaze on the hearth. Having spread her clothes before the fire, Ekatrina passed around him to the fireplace, to get her comb from the shelf above it. As she reached up, a sudden draft of air sucked the bottom of the linsey gown into the flame.

In the same instant Manwell sprang up and seized her, pulling her back from the fireplace. Quickly he took hold of the homespun garment near the bottom of it, and rolled it into a ball, pressing it tightly in his hands, to smother the fire.

In the excitement, Ekatrina forgot that she was holding the garment about her, and, with no intent on the part of either the man or the woman, Manwell found himself looking upon the unveiled beauty of this rustic Daphne, into whose heart no leaden arrow had been shot to harden it against the advances of her strange Apollo from the world beyond the big timber.

Involuntarily his hands relaxed their hold on the crumpled linsey garment. With no conscious volition on his part, they went out toward the woman. She did not flee. He took her in his arms. There was no call for help; rather, there was the sound of a woman's laughter, in which was a strain of contentment.

It was high noon when Mother Sherbinin and little Ivan returned from the flax shed. Ekatrina and her mother had an animated conversation. It began when Mother Sherbinin complained that Ekatrina had been idle all morning. Ekatrina's answer was long. Her mother's comment was short, and in a pitch of excitement.

Ekatrina again spoke at some length, and with an unnatural awkwardness. When she finished, Mother Sherbinin kissed her on the forehead, and the two women went about getting some black bread and a bowl of milk on the table. If Manwell had been less busy with dark and unpleasant thoughts, he would have observed that both women now looked on him with proprietary benevolence and tried to anticipate his wants.

Manwell took himself out of the house as soon as the noon meal was finished. He walked across the field to the river, and down the river to the timber. He wandered aimlessly, driven by the scourge of his conscience.

Remorse subjected him to a flagellation more painful than could have been inflicted by Cossack whips. He had betrayed hospitality, violated honor, despoiled innocence. He had surrendered to all that he had held to be low and despicable. Time and again his sense of shame made him so weak that he leaned against a tree. Chills of disgust shook his frame.

And while he walked in this forest of self-denunciation, Ekatrina was beating out flax in the shed, singing as she worked, and working with such zeal that during the afternoon she accomplished more than even Father Sherbinin did in an entire day.

As the sun got low, Manwell turned back to the village in despair. Ekatrina returned to the house radiant of face and exalted in spirit.

How he lived through that night, Manwell often wondered. He decided that he would await Father Sherbinin's return, and then take the damnable money belt and its contents and move on. He had found an Eden and lost it.

He went to bed early that night, in order that he might be alone with his miserable thoughts. Ekatrina had gone into the village, that she might be with other girls. She went hither and yon, calling at half a dozen houses. In each she laughed and talked with a girl about her own age. She blushed much, and there was no end of quiet merriment.

When she returned home and went to bed, she quietly slipped back the curtain between the two beds, and stealthily listened to see if Manwell was asleep. Believing that he was, she bent over and kissed his forehead ever so lightly. Her lips were as hot irons to his skin, yet he feigned sleep. Stepping back to her side of the room, she replaced the curtain, climbed into bed, and slept soundly until Mother Sherbinin called her in the morning.

The next day Manwell passed in a stupor of misery. He kept away from the brethren. He did not appear at the house at noon. He was late coming in at night. The family had finished supper. Father Sherbinin was at home.

When Manwell stepped into the house, the peasant rose from the bench at the table. The stranger marveled that he had not been impressed with Father Sherbinin's size and strength. The peasant was big enough and powerful enough to kill a man with his hands.

"You are late!" Father Sherbinin exclaimed, with something akin to cordiality in his voice. "You are late, and we have much to talk about."

Manwell stared. He saw only the bearded peasant. He did not observe that Mother Sherbinin and Ekatrina were hurrying about to get a fresh supply of victuals for him.

"Come, sit down!" Father Sherbinin commanded. "I am glad that you have listened to the Spirit. You would have been lost if you returned to the world of Antichrist. We will build you a house at once. I am glad that you have taken Ekatrina for a wife. All the brethren are glad. When the old life is dead, it is a time to be glad. Ekatrina has been a credit to me. You will be a credit to me!"

IV

SINCE the Russian government, for the Doukhobors, was a typical example of all governments, and since none remembered a time when imperial decrees and official ukases, whether emanating from the Czar or from the local tax collector, were favorable to these people of peculiar faith, it was but natural and logical that they should view all governments with determined suspicion, and look upon even minor laws and regulations as opposed to the Christian spirit.

Peter Verigin, their great leader, had not yet arrived in the new land, being still in exile in Siberia. Without their revered leader to advise them, the Doukhobors became exceedingly cautious in their dealings with the Canadian government. They met the regulation providing for the registration of vital statistics with evasion and subterfuge. Believing that the laws of governments had nothing to do with marriage, they refused to register such events with the government. Marriage was but a mating, and governments and laws had no more to do with it than with the mating of bluebirds.

Thus, while Manwell experienced a crushing sense of guilt, Ekatrina was conscious of no misbehavior. She had acted in harmony with the laws and customs of her people.

Manwell, of course, had violated the laws and conventions of his world; and yet, in this Doukhobor village, he discovered that instead of being a disgraceful sinner, he was now a respected married man. Let

the most daring rationalist boast of his freedom from the superstitions of the past! Invisible tentacles, reaching out from the tenebrous jungle of savage ancestry, sway his thought and dictate his action.

Manwell began to read the supernatural into these events. A man may not believe that it is bad luck to walk beneath a ladder, and yet he will walk around, rather than under, with the excuse that there is no occasion to prove his courage. A child may suspect that Santa Claus is a myth, but he will hold his peace, because to do so is to play safe. Manwell's attitude toward these unexpected and astonishing developments was that some super-power *might* be guiding his life, and it would be imprudent to translate into action, his doubt of the existence of such powers.

More spruce logs were brought from the timber, and another sod-thatched house was built. As one came up from the river by the road that ran through the village, the new house was the first one encountered. Father Sherbinin's house was next, no more than a hundred feet away.

The men of the village worked on the new house. Flurries of snow heralded the near approach of the long winter, and Manwell and Ekatrina must be housed in their own nest as soon as possible.

Manwell worked on the house with the other men. There was an interesting novelty in it for him. Ekatrina worked diligently on the linen, the bedding, the simple ornaments for her future home. She helped Manwell to make the benches, the table, the beds, and other simple furnishings. Hers was the happiness of contentment. Manwell's happiness was that born of resignation and relief.

The house was completed, the neighbors came in, and Manwell and Ekatrina were duly launched on the matrimonial waters. The long winter nights came on. The monotony of life in a snow-bound village naturally brought the man and woman closer together. Ekatrina could be quite happy if only she sat before the fireplace, sewing, with her man near her. Silence did not oppress her if the beloved presence was there.

Manwell had memories of other days, other worlds, and perhaps, other women, and the silence of a winter night profoundly stirs such memories. He craved conversation and the sound of voices. He could not put in one long evening after an-

other talking about chickens, the depth of the snow in the drift beyond the meeting-house, or Father Sherbinin's sore toe, injured when one of the oxen stepped on it. He could not talk of the days of oppression in Russia, because he knew nothing about them. He could not discuss the doctrines of the faith, because he did not understand them.

So simple a people, in so small a community, are not prolific in gossip, but Manwell must needs have something to talk about. At first, he put in much time on Ekatrina's English lessons, and in his efforts to learn Russian from her; but how can one understand an English word without knowing something about the English world?

Before either Ekatrina or Manwell realized it, the study of English had created in the woman an appetite for knowledge about the world beyond the big timber. One remark led to another. Ekatrina listened to her husband's stories about the outer world as a child listens to tales from the "Arabian Nights" or a fairy book.

Manwell scrupulously conformed to the conventions of the Doukhobor brethren. In the work that was a community business he did his part with such zeal that his diligence and industry was often the subject of conversation before many of the fireplaces in the village. When there was business in the meetinghouse, he attended; but when asked for an opinion on any matter of importance, he held his peace. This modesty further recommended him to his peasant neighbors.

No circumstance better reflects the atmosphere in which Manwell now found himself than the fact that the belt and the money still remained on the window ledge in Father Sherbinin's house. No one touched it, unless, perhaps, Mother Sherbinin held it up while she dusted the ledge, or laid it on the floor while she washed the window.

Neighbors often visited in the clean front room, but the leather belt aroused no curiosity and inspired no comment. Manwell had not touched it since it had been removed from his body by Father Sherbinin. Here was more money than any peasant in the village had ever seen, and yet week after week and month after month it rested there on the window ledge, unguarded.

Often there was no one in the house.

There was not a lock on a door or a window. When the weather permitted, the very window on the ledge of which the belt lay was open. As for taking any of the money, no one thought of such a silly thing—no one except young Ivan, who thought the yellow metal pieces served very well as ornaments for the roof of his bird house, which was his especial pride.

The winter wore on. The spring thaws set in. By the middle of April the village showed signs of awakening from its lethargy. By the middle of May, the little community was at work, preparing for planting. By the beginning of June, every able-bodied man or woman was afield.

Manwell saw Doukhobor life at its best—a happy, industrious people. About him was contentment, but the even level of it distressed him. The monotony of mediocrity surrounded him, and he missed the contrast between rags and silks. Industry seemed less a virtue because prodigality was not present for comparison. Unrest was working in his soul. Revolt against the very security of life in these surroundings was stirring within him.

One thing reconciled him—Ekatrina was about to become a mother. In about four months there would be a third soul beneath the thatched roof of the new house. This anticipation thrilled Manwell. To have a son—he took it for granted that it would be a son—of his own flesh and blood would give him a new interest in life.

Frankly, he had become very fond of Ekatrina. There was a sense of humor in her, a daring, and a loyalty to him which made her an acceptable companion in the midst of these simple people; but a son would be different! A son would make this strange life interesting. Perhaps he would rekindle the fires of ambition in his father.

But was that desirable? The flames of ambition must be fed, and where, in this valley of the commonplace, was there fuel for them?

In one phase of his anticipation there was a singular pleasure for Manwell. During the long evenings, when he had exhausted the small talk which Ekatrina could understand, he would sit before the fire and build castles in the changing flames—castles that were the homes of romance in the land of Might Have Been. He would picture himself as the head of Bradherdt's great bank. He would dream of Cora in a setting of luxury and elegance. He would

see her as the mother of his son—and that was a vision to thrill his soul!

There was no mental infidelity to Ekatrina in these pictures or in the thoughts which they inspired. In a material and prosaic world, in which married life never is complete bliss, and often is a form of slavery, it is the solace of men and women to sustain themselves on thoughts of how different it all would have been, how infinitely better, perhaps, if they had joined their lives and fortunes with some one else.

The husband thinks of the love of his youth, and finds a somber pleasure in the illusion of placing that time-dimmed love in the place of his wife. The wife remembers the handsome young fellow who first awakened her amorous emotions, and makes her present marital discomforts bearable by imagining how different it all would have been if she had married her first love.

If men and women could not feed on dreams of a perfect love realized, they could not long tolerate imperfect marriage; and thus they have a harmless opiate for the vicissitudes encountered in this greatest of compromises known to society. They soften the torturing arrows of defeat and failure by pretending to believe that they have been cheated out of their ideal helpmeet by perverse fate. They never awaken to the realization of the fact that the only perfect love is the love unrealized and unsoiled by possession.

Manwell had loved Cora, and he believed that she had loved him with a depth of affection that would have withstood the trials and misfortunes of life. Love from such a woman as Cora, a beautiful princess in a cultured circle of exclusive society, was the more miraculous and wonderful because it had been bestowed on one who had come up from the gutter. His love for Cora, and Cora's love for him, were the greatest things in his life; and he owed even that to Bradherdt.

Bradherdt, the famous New York banker, had picked Manwell from a Bowery gutter. He had educated him, advanced him, taught him the banking business, and stood sponsor for him in society.

When he observed that his protégé found an extraordinary attraction in Cora Marsh, Bradherdt made it a point to meet Colonel Marsh, Cora's father, at a club. As they talked over their cigars, he found occasion to remark that he had picked a real man when he picked this young fellow.

"Enough of a man, colonel, to make me know that whatever I leave him in the way of a fortune will be in mighty competent hands."

After hearing that bit of gossip, Cora found it very easy to love the young man who some day would inherit a substantial part, if not all, of the eccentric Bradherdt's fortune. If Cupid sometimes shows flashes of business sagacity, the times are to blame!

Manwell permitted himself to dream an impossible dream. His pleasure was the more complete because it contemplated a perfection. It was unembarrassed by the imperfections of reality, it was not marred by the frailties of a woman in the flesh. Facts have faults, but fancies always are built out of superlative virtues. Ekatrina was the fact. Cora was the fancy.

V

WITH the quickening of sensibilities which so often accompanies the prenatal days of the expectant mother, Ekatrina was conscious of a profound change in her husband. He was, on occasions, strangely gentle with her, and his gentleness made her uneasy. Did he not know that every Doukhobor woman did her share of the work, both in the field and in the house, even to the day of her deliverance?

That strange power, a sixth sense baffling science, more than intuition and less than infallible clairvoyance, whereby a woman senses things beyond her comprehension, told Ekatrina that she had a rival. She did not know whether that rival was a person or a circumstance. She knew only that a menace was near.

Manwell was her life. Life is a very delicate thing, sensitive to clouds and sunshine, to wind and calm, to the subtle forces of nature and the magnetism of other living bodies about it. Ekatrina registered an emotional reaction to Manwell's going out and coming in, to his talking and his silence, to his laughter and his solemn mien. His every word and action registered on her sensitive spirit, as every change in the weather, however slight, registers on a barometer.

This premonition of a danger, more formidable and terrifying because she had not the least conception of its nature, changed Ekatrina from a fearless, care-free girl to a timid, tormented woman. She began to dread any deviation from the established order of things. If Manwell was late com-

ing from the field, she was in terror until he appeared. If he ate less than usual, she was anxious. If he snored more than usual, she was perplexed. If he embraced her with unusual warmth, she wondered why. If he failed to embrace her, she was in misery.

Any unusual happening in the village disturbed her. One afternoon in June she was sitting on the bench in front of the house, sewing on some very tiny garments, when a stranger came up the road from the ford. He was powerfully built. His face was clean-shaven, and his eyes were hard gray. His lower jaw set heavily, and his neck was short and thick. His manner was determined, as if born of complete confidence in himself.

The stranger stopped at the gate and tipped his hat to Ekatrina.

"Do you speak English?" he asked.

Anxiety choked Ekatrina, and all she could do was give him an affirmative nod.

"Tell me, please, where can I find Mr. Sherbinin?"

Ekatrina remained speechless. She pointed to the next house.

"Does he live in that house?"

Ekatrina nodded. She got up from the bench and edged toward the corner of the house, intending to retreat through the door.

"Will I find Mr. Sherbinin at the house or in the field?"

Just then Ekatrina heard the creaking of the windlass at the well. What if Manwell were there? Fear makes cowards of most men and gives most women courage. Ekatrina wanted to run away, but she feared that her husband might be at the well. For some inexplicable reason she did not want him to meet this strange man.

Instead of retreating into the house, she retraced her steps along the bench and the front of the building, passing so near the stranger that he could have touched her, to the opposite corner, where she could see the well. Father Sherbinin was drawing water. Evidently he had come in from the field to refill the water jugs.

"There!" said Ekatrina, pointing to her father. "He is at the well."

"Thank you," the stranger said, as he raised his hat and smiled broadly.

As he turned to go, he took from his pocket a magazine. Having read it, he thought that this peasant woman might enjoy the pictures in it, even if she could not

read it. Perhaps this one could read, for she looked more intelligent than most peasant women; and there was no denying that she was prettier.

The stranger made his way between the two houses to the well. Father Sherbinin scrutinized him carefully, and no one may know what thoughts prevailed behind that stolid peasant face.

"You are Mr. Sherbinin?" the stranger began.

"Yes," replied the peasant.

"The commissioner at Swan River told me that you were an honest man, and that I should talk with you."

"You are a government agent?" Father Sherbinin asked.

"Yes, in a way," the stranger said, believing that the prestige of government connection would make his task easier.

"Very well! What business have you with me?"

"Tell me, has there been a strange man in this village within the last year or so?"

"Many strangers may pass through a village in so long a time," said the peasant.

"But you would remember this fellow, I am sure," the stranger insisted. "He was rather tall, with blue eyes and light hair—a very good-looking young fellow, with just a slight scar on his chin."

"And you are a friend?"

"He might not say so, Mr. Sherbinin. To be frank with you, he is wanted in the United States. They say he is a thief. I am—"

The stranger did not finish, but drew aside his coat and showed a silver shield.

"I understand," said Father Sherbinin. He passed his corded and hairy hand over his bearded face.

"You are too late," he continued. "The man you seek is dead. He died in the river yonder, and the law cannot touch him now."

"You are sure?"

"It must be the same. He had a great deal of money in a belt."

"How did you know that?"

"Because the belt and the money is on my window ledge. It has been there for many months. I will feel that Christ is good to me if you will take those tokens of the Evil One out of my house."

The two men went to Father Sherbinin's house. Ekatrina watched them, peeping about the corner of her own dwelling. They remained in the house some ten minutes.

When they came out, the stranger went to the road and walked rapidly toward the ford. Father Sherbinin returned to the well, picked up the two water jugs, and went on to the field.

Ekatrina watched the stranger as he waded into the ford. Evidently he had been instructed how to cross it safely. She watched him climb the slope beyond and disappear where the forest closed over the highway.

Dropping down on the bench again, the woman breathed a sigh of relief. Why should a stranger come from beyond the timber? What if he had come to call her man back to that other life? She thought about that possibility, and decided to hold her peace. She would tell her husband nothing about this stranger's visit.

Idly she picked up the magazine. It was full of strange and wonderful pictures—women in strange dresses, men decked out as she had never dreamed. There was one picture of a ballroom with grand ladies and gallants. In the center of the picture a courtier gracefully held a woman's hand to his lips—and such a woman!

Ekatrina looked at the picture for a long time. For a longer time she looked at the blue sky above the big timber, and dreamed. How wonderful it would be to be the lady in the picture! Surely, such beautiful persons were not Antichrist!

When Manwell returned from the field that evening, for the first time, Ekatrina did not have the evening meal ready. She was sitting on the bench at the window in the front room, looking at an old magazine.

She had intended that the wonderful picture book should not be seen by either her husband or Father Sherbinin. She knew that her father was likely to confiscate the book as an instrument of the devil, and that her husband was sure to ask questions as to how she came into possession of it; but she was so entranced by the vision of herself wearing the gorgeous gowns and jewels of the woman who, in the picture, was letting a most attractive young man kiss her hand, that Manwell was standing over her before she was aware of his presence in the house.

She looked up and flushed guiltily, but her misgivings quickly yielded to delight when her husband smiled down on her and asked:

"Do you like it?"

"It is much pretty!" she exclaimed.

"But why is the kiss on the hand when it is so much nicer on the lips?"

Manwell laughed at the question. In a spirit of levity he took Ekatrina's hand and, with an extravagant bow, raised it to his lips.

"There! Is such a kiss wasted?"

"It is very nice, but it is better on the lips."

"Very well, on the lips it shall be!"

"That is more better, and two kisses on the lips are more better than one."

Manwell kissed her a second time, and she went about the preparation of the evening meal in high spirits, free, for the time being, from the misgivings aroused by the determined-looking stranger.

While Ekatrina got supper, Manwell looked at the magazine. He, too, found it absorbingly interesting. It was the first magazine or paper that he had seen from the outside world in a year.

One article in it described the parks of New York. Among the illustrations were views of Madison Square, Columbus Circle, and Riverside Drive. How often he had frequented those places! The summer evenings when Cora and he had strolled along the drive! The New Year's Eve when they had joined the revelers in Broadway, and, as a part of the good-natured, noisy crowd, had walked from Times Square down to Madison Square!

Manwell ate his supper in silence. Ekatrina might have given him spruce bark, or pine needles, for all the notice he took of the food he was eating.

As soon as he had finished, he pulled the bench to the end of the table, so that he might avail himself of the light which Ekatrina used while washing the dishes. He spread the magazine out before him and resumed his dreaming.

Having finished her work, Ekatrina sat down on the bench beside her husband.

"Tell me about it," she said.

There are times when one must talk if one would escape insanity. Manwell turned the pages of the magazine and explained the illustrations. A more acute mind than Ekatrina's might have observed that he talked most readily about the pictures from the great city of New York.

Ekatrina listened to all that he said concerning these engravings of streets that looked like great cañons, with rivers of people running between the steep walls of stone and brick; but secretly she wondered why

he should waste so much time on them when there were pictures of grand ladies and handsome men, only a few pages farther on in the book. Finally he came to these other pictures, and would have dismissed them with little or no comment, if Ekatrina had permitted it. She began to question him.

"Is the lady really so poor?" she asked, as she pointed to one figure shown in an evening gown that was daringly décolleté.

"Poor!" Manwell repeated. "She is supposed to be very rich."

"Then why is so much of her dress not there?"

When women themselves cannot tell the why and wherefore of their styles, it is not to be wondered at if Manwell found it difficult to explain to Ekatrina these vagaries of the *beau monde*. It was very baffling and very absorbing to the peasant girl.

When Father Sherbinin went to bed that night, he observed that the candle was still burning in the kitchen of the house next door. He commented on the fact to Mother Sherbinin, and expressed the hope that Ekatrina was not ill.

"A woman as far along as she is will have some unpleasant days," Mother Sherbinin reminded her husband; "but it is nothing that she will remember when she has a child at her breast!"

"Sometimes I fear Christ is not risen in the girl," Father Sherbinin said gravely.

"Ekatrina is a good girl!" Mother Sherbinin protested.

"But she is not at peace with the world."

"There is no peace for a woman until she has children. Leave her to the Spirit!"

Father Sherbinin made no reply to this; but, long after his good wife was breathing heavily, he lay awake wondering what the stranger might have said to Ekatrina, and whether, if he had questioned her, she had exercised the discretion warranted in dealing with emissaries of the government.

Unwilling to awaken anxiety or curiosity in his daughter's mind, Father Sherbinin decided to say nothing about the stranger's business, but to treat his appearance in the village as an inconsequential incident, worthy of no comment. In his own mind, however, the event took on a profound importance. Even a simple peasant possessed of an almost fanatical religious zeal retains the paternal instincts. Father Sherbinin wanted to shield Ekatrina from all disturbing vicissitudes.

He wanted, also, to see that his son-in-law remained within the sphere of godly influences. As one of a universal brotherhood, Father Sherbinin felt that he was doing his duty, and a service to Manwell, if he removed a potential temptation. The old peasant was quite pleased with himself for having rid his house and the community of the money belt and the tokens of the devil. In the communistic society of the village, no one needed money. It was, Father Sherbinin believed with good reason, dishonest money. If ever Manwell wanted it, it would be convincing evidence that he entertained thoughts and purposes that were unchristian.

VI

THE next morning Father Sherbinin made it a point to walk with Manwell on the way to the fields. If Ekatrina had told her husband that a stranger had been in the village and had talked with Sherbinin, surely Manwell would betray the knowledge in his conversation. The peasant even put some leading questions, but no word of Manwell's suggested that he knew about the visitor from beyond the Big Timber.

Father Sherbinin smiled inwardly, and fervently thanked the Spirit for having given him wisdom and understanding in the presence of strangers; but he did not know that the stranger who had taken the belt and the money had left behind an old magazine filled with strange and entrancing pictures. Night after night Ekatrina brought out the well thumbed periodical, and, as a child insists on having its favorite fairy story repeated again and again, importuned Manwell to tell her once more about the pictures.

The grand lady and the bowing gallant became a part of her dreams, and a great longing took possession of her. She began to hint, covertly at first, but with increasing boldness, that she would like to see the world beyond the big timber. Her imagination moved her will, and her dream became a determination.

Determination, sired by imagination and born to a woman — an irresistible force, which bends time and circumstance to its purposes! In a Judith, it mocks the power and glory of the Assyrian monarch with the dripping head of Holofernes on the walls of Bethulia. In an Olga, it turns a woman from the slaughter in the flaming Drevlian villages to become the first Christian in the

ruling house of savage Russia. In a Cleopatra, it destroys the power of a Mark Antony, seduces a Julius Caesar, and changes the history of the world. In a French peasant girl, it transforms the dreaming virgin of Domremy to the savior of France. In a Charlotte Corday, it changes a shrinking, timid woman to a Nemesis whose dagger drinks the crimson blood of the ferocious Marat. What miracle, then, may this spiritual dynamite work in a simple Doukhobor peasant girl!

Doubtless, the modern or expert in neurosis would have found no difficulty in diagnosing Ekatrina's mental state as she approached confinement. There was present a premonition of disaster. It had nothing to do with the well-being of her unborn child. Childbirth was quite an ordinary event in the Doukhobor settlements. A complicated civilization had not reduced the woman to frailty and deformity. They contemplated their ordeal with no dread. They worked at manual labor until a few days before the baby came, and they were back at their heavy chores a few days after the event.

Ekatrina's training and environment had molded her thoughts in the common and accepted pattern. She felt no anxiety about the outcome of an experience which was as natural, and as much a part of a woman's life, as eating and sleeping and working. She would come to her hour, there would be the usual incantations over her, an hour or two of labor, and her child would be nestling at her breast.

Her psychoneurosis took another direction. She could scarcely endure having Manwell out of her sight, and when he was with her she was unhappy if he was not talking of the world beyond the big timber. The old magazine, with its magnificent pictures, now thumbed and ragged, always was near her. She took it to bed with her, as a child takes its favorite doll. If she misplaced it and could not find it for a time, her agitation was extraordinary.

An element of deceit added to her nervous confusion, for she was determined that the old magazine should not come to the notice of her father or mother. She kept it hidden when there was a likelihood that either of them might appear. She put it out of sight when any of the neighbors came in. Her conscience made treason of this, and goaded her with crimination.

Manwell was considerate. He spent so

much time with Ekatrina that Father Sherbinin, with the mild firmness that always marked his words, chided him for neglecting the work in the fields.

Telling Ekatrina about the great world beyond the big timber was not an unpleasant task. Most imprudent things are not unpleasant in the beginning. Talking of the world from which he had come, made him dream about it, and his dreaming about it fed his longing for a return to it. He found it increasingly difficult to withstand Ekatrina's importunate suggestions that they should make an excursion into that other world.

Ekatrina's suggestions soon changed to outright entreaty, and entreaty presently to querulous insistence in which there were traces of hysteria. Her mental tension produced a sympathetic physical tension.

One day Manwell went afield, promising his wife that he would return early in the afternoon. He had been gone but a short time when Ekatrina looked on the shelf, behind the crocks, for the old magazine. It was not there. If a society matron of wealth and distinction had opened her jewel box and found her favorite string of pearls missing, she would have experienced no greater shock than did the peasant girl.

Perhaps Manwell had left the magazine in the front room! No—it was not there. The agitated woman began to search. The longer she was denied the object of her quest, the greater became her distress. She looked high and low, but did not find the periodical. She found no consolation in the thought that Manwell had probably put it away, and would be able to find it as soon as he arrived home.

He did not come early, as he had promised. Each minute seemed an hour, and it was two hours or more beyond the usual time before he showed up. The oxen had mired in the creek bottom, and he had remained to help extricate them.

Ekatrina was in a state of collapse. Manwell got her to bed and called in Mother Sherbinin. He then sought Father Sherbinin.

"Is there a doctor at the railroad station?" he asked.

"We have no need for doctors in this godly community," replied the old peasant.

"But Ekatrina should have a doctor!"

"Would you put her in the hands of the devil's servant?"

"But she is ill—she needs help!"

"Let her ask for help from God, who watches over and cares for His children," the peasant advised. "We have no use for doctors!"

"If anything should happen to—" Manwell was about to say "my son" when Father Sherbinin interrupted him.

"What happens is the will of the Spirit. Have you not learned to pray?"

By nightfall Ekatrina was feverish, and Manwell was desperate. It was ten miles to the little town on the railroad. There were no horses in the village, only the slow-moving oxen, owned as community property, and not to be used on a private enterprise without the formal consent of the brethren, expressed by action in the meeting house.

Several neighbors had come in. Mother Sherbinin insisted that Manwell should stay out of the front room, where Ekatrina was lying in the alcove bed. Suddenly revolt flamed up in his soul. So much ignorance! So much stupidity! He would have none of it! It should not jeopardize the life of his son! Without saying a word to any one, he took his hat and coat and started down the road toward the ford.

Toward morning Ekatrina insisted on seeing her husband. Neither incantations nor protestations could quiet her. Mother Sherbinin looked for Manwell on the back porch, and then went to her own house to see if he had remained with Father Sherbinin. When the old peasant was awakened and asked if he had seen Manwell, he thought for a moment and said:

"He has gone to the village for a doctor, but there is no doctor there."

"When will he be back?" Mother Sherbinin asked anxiously.

"It is twenty miles there and back. The sun will be up several hours before he can return."

Mother Sherbinin went back to Ekatrina. She tried to smile cheerfully when she told her daughter:

"That's like husbands! They make much of nothing! He has gone to the village to find one of those ungodly doctors; but be at peace, my child. He will not find one, and he will be back soon."

"I do not want a doctor, but I must have Herman!" Ekatrina cried. "He has gone to the railroad! He will not come back!"

Manwell came back. The sun was three

hours high when he came across the ford. He was physically exhausted and mentally afraid. He came up the road to the house. Father Sherbinin was in the kitchen.

"How is Ekatrina?" Manwell asked.

"It is the will of the Spirit that she should live. She needs no doctor."

"I shall go in," Manwell said, turning toward the front of the house.

"Wait," Father Sherbinin counseled.

"Know first that it was the will of God that the child should not know the tribulations and trials of this life."

Manwell stood for a moment as if he had been turned to granite. Sherbinin went out of the house. Manwell, dazed and benumbed, as if he had been struck a blow on the head, went unsteadily through the middle room of the house and stood in the door of the front room. Mother Sherbinin was seated on the bench at the front window, but he did not see her. He looked at the alcove bed. He saw Ekatrina staring at him from dilated eyes. There were no tears on her cheeks. No one was sobbing.

"You have come back!" Ekatrina cried, her words pregnant with doubt.

He went across the room, put his arms about his wife, and kissed her. She held his head between her hands and looked into his face for a long time. Then, in a tone of quiet content, she repeated:

"You have come back!"

One evening, about three weeks later, Manwell sought Father Sherbinin, who was at the well. Manwell lost no time in preliminaries.

"Ekatrina and I are going away," he said.

Father Sherbinin rested the bucket on the edge of the well casement and looked at Manwell.

"You will go back to the world of Antichrist and take a woman with you?"

"There is no need to try to explain to you, Father Sherbinin. Ekatrina wants to go, and I can never find peace here. We will take the belt and the money and go back to my world."

"Come with me!" Father Sherbinin said.

He led the way to the house and into the front room, and, pointing to the window ledge on which the money and belt had lain for many months, he said:

"You do not see the trinkets of the devil. They are gone. Some time ago a man of the government came to me, seek-

ing a thief. Believing that Christ had risen in you, I told him that the man he sought was dead. I was sure that the man of Antichrist had been drowned in the river. There is no need for money here. It is always a cause of rejoicing when a government man goes his way and leaves honest folk to their honest ways. I told him that since the evil man he sought was no more, he had better take the evil money and be off. There is no belt and no money."

Manwell was speechless.

"God has been good to you," Father Sherbinin continued. "The temptation is gone. You will stay among godly people. You will save your soul and the soul of my Ekatrina!"

Manwell went from the house without a word and slowly returned to his own domicile, where Ekatrina, radiantly happy, awaited him.

VII

WHEN Manwell returned to his kitchen, he found Ekatrina in strange attire.

Having had no mirror in which to view the effect of her toilet, she was altogether ignorant of her grotesque appearance. She had taken several pieces of homespun cloth and draped them about her form. The piece which served in lieu of a waist had been drawn tight around her just below her arms, leaving her shoulders and neck bare.

Her wealth of hair made a veritable tower on her head, and seemed to stand there in violation of the law of gravity. Into this Leaning Tower of Pisa she had stuck two pewter forks, one on either side, in imitation of the combs worn by the grand lady in the magazine picture. The pieces of cloth that she had used for her gown came only to her knees, but she had tied the sleeves of her cotton house dress about her waist in such fashion that the dress itself swept the floor behind her and served as a regal train.

Amazed, Manwell stood in the door of the kitchen and looked at her.

"If only I had the pretty boots, Herman, it would be like the picture?"

Manwell was silent. The smile faded from Ekatrina's face, and in that mirror of her emotions came the reflection of her anxiety.

"You are not turned against me? I must learn how to act in such clothes, if we are going quick beyond the big timber."

Manwell impetuously took her in his

arms and kissed her in the hollow of her shapely neck. There was so much enthusiasm in the embrace that Ekatrina blushed.

"I am sorry, Ekatrina," he said, as he held her close to him, "but we cannot go."

"But only an hour ago you said yes! You tell me you are so happy to go! You say we will go far away and begin to live!"

"Ekatrina, the money is gone. Father Sherbinin gave it to a government man."

Manwell found it difficult to tell Ekatrina this news, because he expected it to distress her exceedingly. She slipped from his embrace and looked at him for a moment, the suggestion of a frown on her face.

"That is no matter, Herman! The money, it is nothing. I had forgot it ever was."

"But we must have money if we are to leave here!"

"I do not know why," Ekatrina dissented. "We can take lunch in a basket and go right away."

"We must have money, if we are to ride on the train."

"If they are so ungodly as to ask money for that, Herman, we shall walk!"

"But you do not understand, Ekatrina," her husband said, as he sat down on the bench near the kitchen table. "It is a long way to the place where we would go."

"I have walked to Thunder Mountain and back in one day, and I could walk to Thunder Mountain and back every day for a whole week, except I would not want to so walk on the Lord's day. I am sure it cannot be farther than that!"

"It is farther than that, many times farther. Even if we could walk, Ekatrina, we would have to eat, and we have no money."

"We could not eat money! We will eat with those who have food. When one is hungry, it is to eat food, and not money!"

"No, it is not like that where we would go. One must buy the food he eats, and one must have money to pay for a place to sleep, and it will take money for clothes."

"That is a strange world, Herman, where only to have money is to eat, and sleep, and have clothes! Do they not know, in that other world, that it is godly to feed the hungry?"

"It is all very different from the way it is here with the brethren. Men and women work for money—"

"No, Herman, you make a joke at me, as you say! No one is so foolish as to

work for money. Everybody know it is to work for the harvest, so there is bread and flax for all."

"I tell you the truth, Ekatrina. They work for money, and then they take the money and buy food and beds and clothing—"

"But if everybody works for money, who is it that works for food and beds and clothes? They do not grow like the red raspberries on Swan River! No, some one must work for them, or there would not be any!"

Ekatrina sat down on the bench beside her husband, and timidly took his hand.

"We can work for money, though it is foolish, and so we can go yet, without the money."

"No! I would not dare to take you away from here, knowing that I could not provide for you. You must believe me when I tell you that we cannot—we must not—go."

Tears came into Ekatrina's eyes. It was the first time that her husband had seen tears in those eyes. Tears, in her world, were for children who had stubbed their bare toes on a stone. They were neither a feminine virtue nor a feminine vice. No Doukhobor wife ever thought of trying to wear away the stone of her husband's authority by subjecting it to the constant dropping of tears.

Ekatrina was ashamed of her tears. She quickly got up from the bench and betook herself to the middle room of the house. She laid aside the garments which, in her imagination, were beautiful, and, slipping into her nightgown, went on to the front room and the alcove bed.

Manwell remained on the bench in the kitchen. He turned about to face the table. Through the window beyond the table there came a shaft of moonlight.

In the midst of a tranquil night, in a society where greed was unknown, where all had the necessities of life and there was no want or poverty, Manwell was torn by a veritable tempest of unrest. The serenity of nature, the humanity of men, the tranquillity of religious faith, are but mockeries to a soul in travail.

Peace is a state of mind. It is internal rather than external, spiritual rather than physical. The moonlight might caress the silent world, the village might rest in the sleep of the just, about him might be the atmosphere of resignation, but Manwell's

soul craved life. The ancient urge of self-expression found no outlet in this little world of stolid mediocrity, where men and women were standardized, where the long were cut down and the short were stretched to fit the Procrustean bed of religious fanaticism.

Manwell had been a man of action and ambition. The heavy hand of the mellowing years had not been laid on him to restrain him and slow down his pace. Action was life. Here, about him, were men and women who breathed and moved, but they did not live; they but waited for death.

At first the atmosphere, the novel society, the tranquillity of both man and nature had appealed to him. Behind him was ruin and disgrace. He had been fleeing from it, seeking a living grave wherein he might bury himself and be forever dead to the calumnious chatter of those who believed him to be a thief, the more despicable because of base ingratitude and treason to his munificent benefactor; but it is difficult to bury the living soul!

This world of social inertia and suppression of the individual had afforded Manwell the opportunity to recuperate from the spiritual coma which had seized him when he realized that a capricious fate had shattered his career just when it gave promise of exceptional brilliancy. It was when he began to realize that the spirit within him was discontented with the peace of the Doukhobor village, that he began to think of ways and means of irrevocably attaching himself to this life of security.

If he accepted the advances made by Ekaterina, perhaps she would bind him so closely that his restless spirit would cease its flights toward that other world. For a time she held him, and then came thoughts of returning to the old life and taking Ekaterina with him, since he had no other thought than to accept the responsibilities and obligations implied in their relations. Yet reason told him that to return to the world beyond the big timber was to invite further disaster and humiliation, and perhaps to bring to naught the one thing he had hoped to accomplish.

He sought another chain to hold him. He was sure that the birth of a son would reconcile him to remaining in the Doukhobor colony. When this son was still born, Manwell's intense hope turned to loathing for the village and its people. He was, it is true, drawn to Ekaterina—so much

so that he would not think of going away without her; but he despised the village, and had only contempt for these plodding, ignorant peasants.

An eagle born to the high crags, the clouds, and the storm, cannot be content with life in a barnyard!

Having suddenly discovered that the one thing which would make it possible for him to return to the old world was irrevocably lost to him, Manwell's longing for the old life became an obsession. As long as he knew he could return to the outer world if he desired, he remained in the Doukhobor colony. When he knew that the means of his return were gone, the village became intolerable and the outer world inevitable. He would go at any price.

The storm in his soul spent itself, as every storm must. Toward morning, when Ekaterina tiptoed through the kitchen in her bare feet, she saw her husband seated on the bench, his arms on the table, and his head resting on them. His heavy breathing told her that he was asleep.

She went quietly across the rear porch, and in the dawn dusk she ran toward the stable. She stopped at the pole that young Ivan had placed as a support for his bird house. It was a heavy pole, set firmly in the ground, and the bird house was no more than six feet above her head. All her life Ekaterina had climbed trees. She grasped the pole and climbed up to the little house.

Holding to the pole with one hand, she reached up to the slanting roof of the little boxlike house, and carefully picked from it the decorations which had been Ivan's pride. When she was sure she had obtained all of them, she slid down with more haste than prudence, and, as a consequence, tore her nightgown almost to shreds.

As she took the little decorations from the roof of the house, she had dropped them carefully near the base of the pole. She now gathered them into her hands, and literally raced back to the kitchen. Holding her prize in one hand, she excitedly shook Manwell by the shoulder.

He was stupid with sleep. When he opened his eyes, he saw, in the dull light of the dawn, a ghost in a ragged white robe.

"Is it enough? Oh, tell me it is enough, Herman!"

"What is it? Who—why, Ekaterina, what is the trouble?"

"Is it enough, Herman? See, there is a handful, and they are very heavy!"

She emptied the contents of her hand on the table. There was a metallic jingle—the ring of gold. Manwell stared at the table. He rubbed his eyes. He slowly put out his hand, as if he expected the objects to disappear when he tried to touch them. He saw a handful of yellow coins.

"Is it enough, Herman?"

"Where did you get them?" her husband asked incredulously.

"I remembered that Ivan had used them to make the top of the bird box look pretty. Oh, Herman, is it enough?"

Manwell counted the yellow coins—twenty-one, in all. They were twenty-dollar gold pieces which little Ivan had appropriated from the window ledge when no one appeared to have any interest in the pretty pieces.

"Yes, Ekatrina, it is enough."

"Then we shall go this day!"

"Yes!" Manwell said with singular emphasis and solemnity. "Yes, we shall go to-day!"

Ekatrina threw her arms about him and kissed him.

VIII

LIFE holds two major thrills—one for the adventurer traveling to a new world, the other for him who returns to an old world. Columbus stepping upon a new continent! Napoleon returning from Elba again to tread the soil of France! Moments of superlative ecstasy! No matter if a new world leads one to chains and an old world leads another to Waterloo, both have lived the supreme moment.

From the moment when Manwell and Ekatrina left Father Sherbinin standing silently at the ford, powerless to restrain the two in what to him was a godless purpose sure to bring disaster on their souls, the woman dreamed of the new world to which she was traveling, while the man rebuilt out of pleasant memories an old world to which he was returning.

A new world must of necessity be a land of fancy, a country of pleasurable adventure, a domain wherein the heart's fervent desire may be realized. The disappointments—aye, the tragedies—of reality are never included in the picture which the eager adventurer paints for himself.

The pigments that color the brush of imagination are the experiences of the past. One cannot imagine wealth in terms other than those which have stood for values in

his experience. The Indian contemplates paradise as a happy hunting ground; the African savage constructs his heaven from his desire for no work and many wives. A poet could not imagine a desirable new world without making it a temple of song, and the new world of a miser's fancy would be a realm of gold.

Ekatrina was going to a new world. She pictured it in the known quantities of her experience. Surely, it must be a wonderful world, an altogether enjoyable world, a place where women wore gorgeous gowns resplendent with jewels and pretty adornments, a world where handsome gallants bowed gracefully as they pressed to their lips a lady's hand!

The peasant girl's mind held only the haziest impressions of the exodus from Russia. The voyage across the ocean and the subsequent rail journey from the Canadian coast to the Swan River Valley might have provided her with colors from which to paint a picture of this other world in the more somber shades of reality; but that long journey had left only the impression of terrifying strangeness.

Spectacles are sometimes so stupendous as to throw an impenetrable shadow over details. Whoever gazes into the Grand Cañon of Arizona will have no eyes for the boulder at his feet or the cactus plant clinging to the edge of the precipice. He will see only colorful immensity. When he turns away, he will be as one who has looked down the corridor of eternity, where the pillar of even the most historic year fails to challenge the attention or break the majestic monotony of the long colonnade.

In all her life Ekatrina had not had a coin in her hand, excepting the time when she climbed the pole to little Ivan's bird house and pillaged it of its ornaments. In the new world of her fancy, even though her husband had told her that beyond the big timber money was the basic essential, she could not picture a society built on private property and currency. Her experience told her that food and raiment came from a common storehouse. She could imagine no reason for accumulating more food than one could eat or more clothes than one could wear.

Her economic philosophy was that of a communistic peasant. She knew that there were in Russia evil persons who had seized great tracts of land, more than they could use. These were ungodly persons, agents

of the Evil One, robbers who had devised something called government to assist them in the persecution of honest folk. She believed that those who held wealth which they did not need for the reasonable requirements of life were dishonest people.

On that economic background she placed the pictures of the magazine which had so profoundly appealed to her. If there were a world in which women wore such beautiful dresses, it must be, of course, a world wherein such garments were to be had by every woman. There must be a common storehouse, similar to the village flax sheds, where any woman might go and obtain pretty clothes. Perhaps she might be required to break flax, to spin it, and to sew the cloth, but what woman did not do these things?

Manwell was returning to an old world, a world from which he had fled but a few years before, determined to have no more of it; but time is a wonderful magician, and distance is a clever trickster. As he trudged along the road through the timber, Manwell was thrilled no less profoundly than was Ekatrina.

He dreamed of a world of action, of achievement and success. The peace he had sought in the Doukhobor village had turned out to be only monotony and mediocrity. It meant the standardization of men and women in a mold of ignorance and repression.

One may have all the black bread he wants, he may have clothes and shelter, and yet be dead. Manwell craved life, and the months he had existed in this communistic sepulcher had convinced him that it was better to live in a Bowery gutter, free to aspire to Fifth Avenue, than to be imprisoned midway between the two levels, with the danger of sinking to the one removed and the hope of obtaining the other forever obliterated.

Always, in the back of Manwell's mind, was the knowledge that he could not return to his old world and resume the status he had enjoyed before his exile. The last time he had been seen in New York he had appeared as a young man, clean-shaven, immaculately dressed, energetic in movement, decisive in speech, studiously polite. He had been removed from foppishness only by the sincerity of his purpose, and by the realization that whatever he was or might become he owed all his success to Bradherdt.

Bradherdt was a Jew. He came to the United States from Poland, to escape the pogroms. He was an industrious and sagacious Jew, and he had his superstitions, as every man has. In this new world of opportunity he began as a tailor. He progressed to become a money lender and a banker. In a few years he graduated as a financier.

One of his superstitions had to do with money. He believed that philanthropy brought him good luck. Invariably, when he was about to engage in some financial project, he sought to propitiate the gods by engaging in some charitable activity. He would not make a heavy loan until he had found a vagabond in the street and handed him a substantial sum.

This bribery of the fates became Bradherdt's fixed rule of conduct. It was as important as the interest rate, or the signing of a note, or the conditions of a bond.

When Bradherdt was invited to join a group of gentile financiers in the handling of a huge industrial loan for interests bent on exploiting natural resources in South America, he gave the invitation long and careful consideration. He felt that there was hazard in being the only Jew participating in the deal, but it offered a handsome profit.

Having decided to accept the invitation, even before he made known his decision, Bradherdt took a long walk. He went into the Bowery district, where he found a lad picking over the spoiled fruit in a garbage barrel near an alley entrance. The boy was a bright-looking chap, and a gentile. Going into a deal with gentiles, perhaps it would be prudent to make a gentile the beneficiary of a substantial gift. This was the most pretentious financial project into which Bradherdt had ever ventured. His sacrifice to the gods of fortune ought, therefore, to be correspondingly important.

He talked to the boy. No home? No parents? No job? No school?

Here was a typical Bowery alley rat, and yet something more—a keen boy with a clear eye and an attractive face, in spite of the grime! The financier made his vow to the gods, and two hours later walked into his bank, leading a boy who was clean and well dressed, awkward and ill at ease. Bradherdt had a new office boy.

Bradherdt took him home that night and for many nights thereafter. He sent him to school. He sent him to college. He

saw to it that he learned the banking business. In time he had a wonderfully efficient assistant—and a slave.

The South American venture was one of the notable successes of financial history. The fates had been doubly kind; they had looked with favor on both the investment and the philanthropy. From the first they returned to Bradherdt a fortune. From the second they produced a son.

A Jewish bachelor with a gentile son! Something to interest the Street! Something to challenge the interest of gossiping society matrons!

Manwell came to worship Bradherdt. It is something to rescue a man from the sea. It is quite another matter to rescue a boy from garbage cans. Manwell came to a full realization of this. He knew that Bradherdt had saved him from something worse than death—endless poverty, degrading ignorance, consuming crime!

Then came the panic, when financiers became the victims of their own system, and the Street found itself chewing a choice morsel of sensational gossip. Bradherdt's protégé had been speculating! He had been using other people's money! That was what came of picking up scum from the gutter!

No one knew definitely the extent of the young man's speculations, but every one knew that they were heavy enough to have caused Bradherdt serious embarrassment. There was a temporary run on the Bradherdt National Bank, and it was believed that both the bank and its founder would have gone to the wall if other bankers had not come to his assistance.

The protégé, the young fellow who had been saved from a life of garbage cans for a future of wealth and power—the very man, in fact, who was already accepted as the husband of Cora Marsh, a rich prize in that social circle which considers itself the halo for Wall Street—was gone! His departure had been sudden, for he had skipped out between suns. Bradherdt was a fool; he should have known that there was no gratitude in a gutter rat. He had invited disaster. Strange, indeed, that a Jew should have been so gullible!

It was considered worthy of comment, too, that Bradherdt was much shaken by this treason. There were those who insisted that he was a broken man. Others said that only his indomitable will was keeping him up. The financiers who came to his

assistance, on terms very profitable to themselves, agreed that this unexpected betrayal by one whom he had trusted implicitly had broken Bradherdt's heart, but had not affected his mind. If anything, he was more shrewd, more sagacious, and more cold-blooded than ever. Financiers place their sympathies where they will draw the highest interest and pay the most attractive dividends.

Bradherdt himself had nothing to say about the incident, other than the story he told the financiers to whom he turned for aid. He became taciturn and reserved. He devoted himself to his business. He pulled through, and paid those who helped him to the last stipulation in the bond; but he was a changed man.

Manwell realized that he could not return to the old world and resume the status he enjoyed when he sneaked away from it. His association with Bradherdt must forever be a closed book. If any one even suspected that he was the man who had been connected with the Bradherdt National episode, Manwell would have been in the position of having paid a stupendous price for that which, when it was in his keeping, he had destroyed by his own folly.

He did not dare to return to New York. He could not expect to reënter society, even if he could hope to attain the material prosperity essential to society life. He would turn to the West and hide himself in the forest of the commonplace. He would slip into the substratum of life in Chicago. He knew enough Russian to disguise his speech if occasion required. His bearded face, his coarse clothes, his Russian wife, their surroundings—these would preclude the possibility of any one discovering him and connecting him with that old sensation.

Emotions are prone to dominate reason. That which a man wants to do soon becomes reasonable. What if he had blasted his own career, what if he had sacrificed his love, was Manwell to deny himself the satisfaction of dwelling in the midst of life?

What he had been he had owed to Bradherdt; what he was now was his own concern. Ekatrina and he would live! They would be nobodies, perhaps, but they would be living nobodies! No wrong would be done to Bradherdt if one who loved and worshiped him snatched from life some of the pleasures of living.

Manwell was returning to his old world. The conditions of his abiding therein would be changed, but it would be the same old world. If he could not play a conspicuous part in it, he could be at least an inconspicuous spectator.

As the two walked along the road through the big timber, Ekatrina's face was radiant. Manwell's was stern, reflecting a grim determination.

It was mid afternoon when they reached the crest of the great ridge which stands between the plains around Preeceville and the timber. From this elevation they could look back over the wide belt of deep green trees to the yellowish fields surrounding the Doukhobor settlement.

Ekatrina stood for a moment with her hand shading her eyes. Manwell watched her.

"I shall come back to it some day," Ekatrina said solemnly.

"It will not be the same when you return," Manwell told her.

"It is always the same!" Ekatrina exclaimed. "It has been just so from the day we arrived."

"But it will be changed when you return, if ever you do return."

"How can that be, Herman, when my people have been just so for years and years and years?"

"I cannot tell you why it will be, or how. You would not understand. After you have been in this other world, Ekatrina, you cannot be happy back there. It may be that you will be sad where we are going. I have half a mind to turn back."

"No, my Herman, you will not turn back! I shall be happy where you take me—I promise you I will. Come, let us not even look back again. See, there is the town, and I have never been in it except the time when we came here from Russia. I wish you would hurry a little, Herman!"

An hour later they arrived in the little Canadian town, and walked along the one street which could boast of shops. They were, indeed, nothing much to boast of, but they had a few displays in their windows, and these interested Ekatrina.

The pair went into a shop and Manwell bargained for a cheap bag—a telescope affair of slate-colored cloth, with several straps around it. Into this he packed their small bundle of personal effects.

"Now we shall have something to eat!" he said, as they went into the street again.

"But you said I should have shoes when we got to the town, Herman, and every one looks at my feet!"

"Are you not hungry?"

"Yes, Herman, I am very much hungry—for shoes!"

Manwell led the way across the street to another shop. When his hand was on the door, he stopped.

"You must have stockings, and before you put them on you should wash your feet. Come, we will have something to eat, and then we shall go to the inn and have a room—"

"But I can wash my feet there!" Ekatrina exclaimed, pointing to a pump and watering trough some fifty feet away.

"The people in the street would laugh at you, Ekatrina."

"Is it so funny to them that I wash my feet?" she asked, with unusual warmth. "Surely, Herman, they are not so like a pig that they do not wash their feet!"

"But they do not wash their feet in public places, where other people can see them," Manwell explained.

"Because why?" Ekatrina asked.

"I will explain it all later. Let us get something to eat first."

The one street led down to the railway station, near which was a large, rambling frame building with a sign bearing the word "hotel" extending out from above the door. A traveling man would probably have pronounced the place a "miserable hole," and a fair lady of the world of which Ekatrina was dreaming would have gathered up her regal robes and refused to enter it. Ekatrina thought it was very grand, and very strange.

It was the first time that she had sat in a chair with a back to it. It was the first time that some one had asked her what she would like to have to eat, and presently brought in the food, steaming hot. She had had no other idea about it than that somewhere and somehow she would prepare their meals, as she had done at home.

The food was strange. She ate of it sparingly, and marveled that her husband seemed to enjoy it. Throughout the meal she was silent.

After the meal she watched Manwell as he went to the bare, dingy office to pay. He pulled one of the gold pieces from his pocket. The pudgy Scot who owned the inn picked up the coin and looked at it closely.

"Have ye nae other money?" he asked.
 "'Tis not even Dominion money."

"It is perfectly good gold from the United States," replied Manwell.

The owner tossed the coin upon the small desk and listened to the metallic ring of it.

"'Tis too big, mon! If 'twere but five dollars, I'd not mind, but it's twenty."

"It is perfectly good," Manwell insisted.
 "The shopkeeper below here asked no questions when I offered him one in payment for the grip."

"So?"

"True," said Manwell.

"Then why not pay me out of the change he gave ye?"

"Because we are going on the train to Winnipeg, and I want Canadian money in my pocket."

"You are from the settlement?"

"As you can see," Manwell replied.

"And ye say it is good money?"

"It is good money."

"Very weel, mon, I've never heard of one o' ye tellin' a lie, but I'll have to charge ye a few shillings for making the change."

"Very well, sir, and we would like to have a room until train time, so you had best take out for it."

"'Tis but two hours until train time. You'll not be after taking a room for that short time?"

"Yes," Manwell said, "we need the room."

"But, mon, you can make yerself at rest here in the office—"

"And may I wash my feet here?" Ekaterina asked. "I must wash my feet, as you very well know, before I get new shoes."

The Scotsman looked at Ekaterina for a moment, and then at Manwell. There was a kindly smile on his face.

"Very well! Have the room then, and I'll not charge ye for it. Perhaps you'd like Mrs. Macgregor to look in on the lady?"

An hour later Ekaterina stepped into the dingy office from the adjoining room, Mrs. Macgregor following her. Manwell was sitting in a chair near the window, and Mr. Macgregor was standing beside him. Two of the townspeople, always curious about these Doukhobor neighbors, had strolled into the office.

"Are they not pretty?" Ekaterina exclaimed, as she stepped toward Manwell, holding up her skirt to show her new shoes. "And the stockings, Herman—see how thin and soft!"

With that she raised her skirt to her knees. Gathering it in one hand, she leaned over and rubbed her other hand up and down one of her newly stockinged limbs.

Mrs. Macgregor and the men in the office were amused and embarrassed. Manwell was only amused, but his amusement was well concealed.

"Yes, Ekaterina," he said, "they are very pretty, but a woman does not hold her skirt so high."

Ekaterina looked at him in astonishment. "Because why?"

And this was the Doukhobor peasant girl who was dreaming of a world of beautiful women in gorgeous gowns and gallant men who bowed gracefully over the hand they pressed to their lips! She had much to learn in the new life that lay before her.

(To be continued in the October number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

A PLEA FOR FREEDOM

UNBAR the door and set me free!
 When I have proved how strong my wings
 And seen how far my eyes can see—
 When I have tested many things,
 I may return—I do not know;
 But let me go!

Nor charge me with inconstancy,
 Nor lay down laws for me to break;
 I may be what I claim to be—
 A myth made mortal for your sake;
 'Tis fruitless, now my heart's away,
 To bid me stay!

Genevieve Sherwin Edsall

California, Here I Come!

THE STORY OF MARIPOSA MACDONALD, WHO WAS QUICK AT
ADDING UP CAFETERIA TRAYS

By Louise Kennedy Mabie

POSIE sat upon her high revolving chair in the white-tiled cafeteria, checking up the trays. Posie's feet did not reach to the floor, but swung back and forth in time to the blaring music like little birds of gray suède. Posie's hair, smooth and parted and bright, shone forth among the black and brown and gray bobs of the other cafeteria girls like that of a little golden saint in a stained glass oriel window.

Posie's face made one think of Venetian dawns, of the scent of growing orange trees at night, of moonlit balconies, of lovers, of dreams. It was small and pale and oval, her lips were the deep color of almond buds in spring, and her eyes were as green and remote and beautiful as forest pools.

Grandma, looking Posie over carefully when she went off to work each day, never mentioned Venetian dawns or forest pools, but she landed with the unerring swoop of a soaring eagle upon the beginning of a run in a gray fiber silk stocking or a loose button on the white sweater.

The woman next door, who had studied art, once said to grandma that Posie looked like a Greuze with a soul. Grandma, who had not studied art, and who did not know a Greuze from a Plymouth Rock, had rubbed her nose and stated that Posie's looks, such as they were, did not wash off, and that the kid could add up a tray quicker and more accurately than any other girl in the whole cafeteria system. Grandma, in fact, had swooped upon the woman next door; but we come to grandma later.

"Roast beef—macaroni and cheese—asparagus — mayonnaise—coffee—roll—butter—pie—seventy-six," checked up Posie, with one sweep of her green eyes, and dropped a gray ticket stamped "76" upon a stout gentleman's tray.

"Baked ham—mashed po—beans—iced

tea—butter—roll—cake—sixty-three," calculated Posie for a bespectacled tourist.

"Fruit salad—ice cream—coffee—thirty-eight," was next in line.

The trays were coming along quickly now, with no intervals between for swinging one's feet to the music. It was half past five, and the city was hungry. Across the park, at the new hotel, Bonnie McCord said the folks dined as late as eight o'clock, but Bonnie must have been pulling a boner. Eight o'clock! Why, at eight o'clock Posie's part of the city had been at the movies for an hour and a half, the cafeteria closed up, and Posie went home to bed.

"Say, swell show at the Met this week," murmured a respectful young masculine voice near Posie's ear. "I'd—I'd be obliged if you could make it to come along, miss. I got a Legion button—"

"Codfish cakes—cucumbers—strawberry shortcake — coffee — butter—roll—wheat cakes—butter—honey—the things they eat—eighty-nine," checked off Posie, and dropped a ticket upon the young man's tray. "Thank you," she added, her eyes on the next in line, "but I have a date at home."

Every one was here to-night—the woman with the wig, the old boy with the horse-shoe pin, the girl with the platinum fox, and most of the chorus from "Purple Pasts" at the theater up the street. Posie sipped from her glass of water when there came an interval between trays. Bonnie McCord, at the coffee urn, sent her the high sign. The boss stopped by, to ask how things were moving. Mary called her "deary," and refilled her glass of water.

They were playing "Marcheta," and suddenly Posie was very happy. She had on a new pair of gray fiber silk stockings. She had her health and some looks. She

had a job. She had grandma. It was a great old world, if you didn't expect humming birds.

"I can add," said a soft voice somewhere below Posie's ear.

The woman in the mink coat had carried her tray to a distant corner of the Pompeian room. She was eating prune whip to-night, and drinking a glass of orange juice. There was a hole in the heel of her stocking. Hard up, thought Posie; out here to break into the movies—not breaking in—

"I can add," repeated the soft voice, "but Pete won't let me. He says adding up's for old fuzzies with beards, in banks. I guess he's never seen you."

Posie glanced down into a pale little face with bobbed straight black hair above it, and a thin little figure in a serge dress buttoned up wrong on one shoulder.

"Hello, honey!" said Posie, smiling down. "Do you want to punch this ticket for me?"

"Oh, how could you know?"

Thin hands were clasped in anticipation, and there was a glow on the small, pale face. Eager fingers were punching under Posie's direction, while Posie's arm was about the serge dress. Three tickets were successfully punched, and then the child sighed, with her head limp against Posie's shoulder.

"I think I'll go back to Pete now," she said. "My ice cream will be waiting. Thank you so very much!"

Funny little thing, thought Posie, smiling after her! Funny, prim little old-fashioned thing! Thank you so very much!" Buttoned up wrong—probably no mother; but clean. The black hair had smelled of castile soap.

Posie's heels swung in time to the music. They were playing "My Sweetie Went Away."

It was grandma's habit, when Posie came home, to check up Posie much as Posie checked up the trays. Grandma, in a beflowered bathrobe, ate a dishful of the early strawberries Posie had brought, and drank a cup of tea, while the girl rocked by the window with Guffy on her lap. Posie's meals were supplied by the cafeteria, and were calculated by a careful government to add the equivalent of eight dollars to Posie's weekly salary.

"The city dads," growled grandma, "are a bunch of gunmen! Look at that water

bill—ninety-four cents for the month—and our room not rented!"

Posie hummed "Marcheta," and Guffy opened a sleepy eye.

"Those new folks across the street are either bootleggers or bandits," averred grandma presently. "They keep their shades down to a crack, and when she hangs out a towel on the line she scuds in and out as if she expected some one to creep up behind her and say 'Tag! You're it!' She acts as if a body might see her!"

"A body did," yawned Posie.

"Who?" barked grandma.

"Mrs. Elspeth Macdonald," said Posie.

"Say, there was a cute little kid in to-night, grandma. Buttoned up wrong. Out here with some one named Pete. Touring, I guess—maybe in an auto camp. No mother. The primmest little thing! 'Thank you so very much,' she said, when I let her punch for me. Hair smelled so nice and clean!"

"You let her alone," warned grandma. "There's six cases of smallpox reported at the Harbor."

"Oh, grandma—the Harbor!" protested Posie.

"Goin' about smellin' strange kids' heads!" snorted grandma. "It's bad enough to have our room not rented, and ninety-four cents for a water bill, let alone you down with scarlet fever. There's two cases reported in San Bedoo."

"Oh, grandma—San Bedoo!" scoffed Posie.

"You let her alone," warned grandma. "Like enough she's some kidnaped kid. I don't want you gettin' into the papers."

"Oh, grandma—kidnaped! You ought to see her," laughed Posie. "Say, you know that woman I told you about in the mink coat—"

Grandma settled back in her armchair to listen. It was the climax of her day.

II

"PETE and I, we've been down to the beach," announced the child next evening, her black head against Posie's shoulder. "We rode on the pike in a sweet little electric carriage Pete hired, and I ran it into a lady. I rang my bell and rang my bell, and she didn't stir, and bing—it went into her leg! 'Well,' she said, 'you needn't skin a fellow!' She was a funny lady."

"I'll say," said Posie. "How old are you, honey?"

"Nine, I guess. My name's Eula. What's yours?"

"Mariposa Macdonald," said Posie.

"I love you, Mariposa Macdonald!"

"It's mutual," said Posie.

"What's mu-tual?"

"Sharing," said Posie.

"Like two straws in an ice cream soda?"

"Just."

"I'd like two straws—with you," said Eula thoughtfully.

Grandma, hearing about the two straws that evening, spoke forcibly of germs. No one had rented the room, and butter had gone up to a sickening fifty-two cents. Posie rubbed Guffy gently between his ears and hummed "The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise."

"Here's Pete," said the child next evening, clinging to the arm of a tall man with a laden tray. "He's got on a new necktie."

"Soft-boiled egg—toast—bottle milk—ice cream—strawberries—roast beef—mashed po—bread—butter—coffee—pie—well, it's for two," thought economical Posie, stamping her ticket and dropping it upon the tray before she looked at Pete.

She was bound to be disappointed in Pete. Any man who hauled a delicate little thing like that about to beaches, and ran her into rough company on the pike, was sure to be disappointing. Posie felt a strange reluctance about looking at Pete.

"Her name's Mariposa Macdonald, and she's prettier 'n mother!" said the child triumphantly. "She's smarter than Miss Finch. Pooh! Miss Finch added up by tens, and then subtracted what had to come off on the sly. Miss Finch was a muff!"

There chanced to fall an instant of quiet in the white-tiled cafeteria. One might think of Venetian dawns, of the scent of growing orange trees at night, in a strange, unusual interval like that. Then Posie, quivering oddly with reluctance and a growing sense of compulsion, looked up at Pete, and Pete looked down at Posie, and the band played "Wonderful One."

"You've bewitched the kid," said Pete presently. "She has acquired a new standard. Her mother is no longer so beautiful, and Miss Finch is a muff."

"That's not me," said Posie. "That's California."

"How?" said Pete.

"Why, when folks come into sunshine like ours, it's bound to cast a shadow on

what they have left behind," said Posie. "Youth like ours is bound to—age."

"*Götterdämmerung*," observed Pete.

"Please don't swear," said Posie.

At this Pete opened his eyes and unexpectedly laughed down at her as he picked up the heavy tray. Pete was nice when he laughed. Pete was young when he laughed. So Eula had a mother, after all—a mother who was, or had been, beautiful! Posie sat very straight in her high-backed chair and tilted her chin. The band was playing "La Golondrina." Well, it was a good enough old world, if you didn't expect humming birds.

That night Posie sat by the window rather silently, with Guffy on her lap, while grandma ate her baked apple. It appeared that a woman had looked at the room, but had objected to Guffy. She asserted that she could feel a cat a block away, and the thought of a resident feline, possibly prowling about at night near her sleeping and defenseless head, would cure her of any further desire to live.

"I guess I'll iron out my green waist now, grandma," said Posie, stirring at last to drop Guffy gently to the floor.

"Any one been bothering you, Posie?" asked the old lady, swooping.

"No," said Posie. "Why should they, if you come down to it?"

"Why shouldn't they, if you come down to it?" returned grandma.

That was the nearest she ever came to running into a compliment. It took some steering when Posie drooped and looked particularly lovely in consequence, but grandma always managed it.

Posie ironed out her green waist and grandma went to bed.

III

THERE came a blank of three days for Posie. For three days they did not come. For three nights Posie sat upon her high chair and checked up trays in a dull, empty brass bowl of a world.

And then, upon the fourth night, she saw them halfway down the line of trays. The child was hanging upon Pete's arm, as usual, but Pete was looking straight across intervening bobbing heads at Posie herself. For an instant their eyes met thus, and held; and the band played "California, Here I Come."

Posie was flushed and oddly tremulous when she checked up their tray. She kept

her hands steady and her lips folded in, but her knees shook continuously beneath the pleated gray skirt, and electric prickles darted up and down her spine.

"One eleven," she said, as she dropped a ticket upon Pete's tray.

She had meant to be cool and distant when they came back, if they came back; but how could she be distant with Eula's arms tight about her and Eula's black head on her shoulder? How could she be cool under Pete's eyes looking down at her with that straight gaze which was a challenge, almost a claim?

"The kid's been sick," said Pete. "Did you—miss us?"

"Miss you?" wavered Posie, and then she dropped her cheek against the straight, black, castile-soaped hair and let herself go. "*Götterdämmerung!*" she said.

"Look here!" said Pete, after a moment. "I can't block this line of hungry hyenas any longer, but I want to see you. I've got to see you. Are you off on Sunday?"

"Until four," said Posie.

"Well, look here! I'm driving down to Del Mar on Sunday, with the kid. We'll be back by four. How about it?"

"Why," wavered Posie, "I never go—"

"I know," said Pete, picking up his tray, "but this is me!"

Posie thrilled unaccountably at the masterfulness of it, and flushed.

"Well, I'll ask grandma," was her ultimatum, over her shoulder.

Grandma, upon being consulted, spoke at some length of recent accidents at Pacific Electric grade crossings. From Posie's halting description, the old lady was convinced that Pete was a bootlegger or a bandit.

"Huh! He own a car!" she snorted.

"I don't know," said Posie. "I think it's hired."

"Where's he from?" demanded grandma, sensibly enough. "What's he out here for? What's his other name? I'll bet he's kidnaped that poor little kid!"

"But, grandma, that's impossible," protested Posie. "She adores him. She hangs on his arm. Kids don't hang on their kidnapers' arms."

"Is he her brother?" barked grandma.

"N-no," admitted Posie.

"Her father?"

"Well, I don't know. He's got lines in his forehead, except when he laughs. He's young when he laughs."

"Where's her mother?"

"Well, I don't know," said Posie. "I thought at first she must be dead, but I don't think so now."

"Gosh!" said grandma, in exasperation. "The things you don't know! Why, I could tell with one flick of my eye what he's done with that poor kid's mother! There was a man last week in Arizona locked his wife up in a closet for three days, because he didn't like her cooking, and fed her raw batter through the key-hole. Do you want to go?"

"Oh, grandma!" said Posie, and clasped her hands.

As a mere baby, Posie had clasped her hands when she wished for anything very, very much; and so grandma knew. Grandma had taken care of Posie all her life. Grandma and Posie were the only East Hallam Macdonalds left.

"The green flannel dress looks like new since I washed and ironed it," conceded grandma, at last; "but you'd have to wear your woolen stockings. It's cold on the Coast Route, and he'd never have a rug."

Posie said nothing, but later, when she tucked the hot water bottle in beside grandma's feet, she leaned over the old lady and kissed her; and so grandma knew. The East Hallam Macdonalds had always been shy about kissing.

IV

POSIE drove down to Del Mar with Pete and Eula. It was still so early when they called for her that a Sunday newspaper lay bulkily upon the walk before each neat bungalow. Milk bottles, looking patient and growing warm, stood about upon steps; but grandma's newspaper had been taken in, and her milk bottle was in the top of her ice chest, cool and at peace. The old lady's eye was at the crack of the curtain.

Posie must have told her companions something of the position of grandma's eye, for they turned to look at the little house, and laughed, and Pete waved his cap. Grandma saw that he had a rug, after all. She saw that the hired car, a roadster for three, was particularly shining and substantial. She saw that the child wore a sweater under her coat.

In three flicks of her eye she saw all this, and much more than this. She saw—but we are getting ahead of the story.

It was a heavenly morning for the Coast Route. The road shone before them,

smooth and deserted and blue. The sea shone beside them, smooth and deserted and blue. Motor busses, pounding down on the long run from Portland to San Diego, passed them once or twice. It was a gorgeous old world, even when you did expect humming birds.

They lunched at the inn at Del Mar, at a corner table, and upon the corner table stood a basket of pink roses and blue delphinium. Posie thought it the nicest basket she had ever seen, and Eula sniffed at the roses, but Pete pushed it aside.

"It may be California, or it may not," said Pete, looking across at Posie; "but I have acquired a new standard. Pink roses are no longer so beautiful. Give me a view!"

"Silly!" said Eula. "Your back's to the window! You're looking at Mariposa Macdonald."

"Sure!" said Pete serenely. "What else did I come for?"

But after luncheon it seemed as if Pete might have come for something else, as well. Posie and Eula sat before huge logs, hissing dreamily and suddenly crackling awake in the foyer fireplace, while Pete and the man at the desk went over the register. For a long time the two men conversed in low voices, their heads bent together above lists of names. When Pete at last rejoined Posie and Eula, there were lines across his forehead, and he looked very tired.

That night grandma checked up Posie vigorously, but the sum total of her information was meager enough. Pete's last name was Vandyke. Posie knew that, because the clerk at the hotel had called after them as they were leaving.

"Gosh!" said grandma. "He hadn't paid his bill!"

"Oh, but he had!" said Posie. "It was a dollar and a half each for our luncheon, and he gave fifty cents to the girl, besides. I saw him!"

"You saw him, and you didn't stop him?" snorted grandma. "You let him throw his money around as if it was so much hay?"

"Well," said Posie, "what could I do?"

"Well," replied grandma, hard put to it, "you could have pushed his foot politely under the table. You could have said you didn't feel hungry, and you guessed you'd take a sandwich. If it had been me," declared grandma, looking like the ancestress who had shot off the musket in the Revolu-

tion, "I'd have got up and left that robber's den the minute I saw those prices!"

"I never thought of the prices," said Posie.

It appeared that in a whole day Posie had gathered together just two additional facts for grandma's consumption—that they lived in New York, and that they were running up to San Francisco, to be gone three or four days, but they were coming back. They were coming back *sure*.

"Well, is he her father, or isn't he?" barked grandma at last, in exasperation. "Seems to me a tadpole deaf in one ear and not able to hear out of the other could have found that out!"

"I didn't ask," said Posie.

"Why didn't you ask?"

"I didn't want to know."

"You didn't want to know!" echoed grandma, in stupefaction, her jaw dropping slowly. "Abner Kittle, back home, didn't want to know what the stamping noise was behind him, and a bull hooked him up over the fence. There's things in this world folks has got to know!"

"Oh, grandma, please!" begged Posie, almost in tears.

After the old lady had grumbled off to bed, Posie sat by the window with Guffy in her lap. Long, long ago grandma had told her the old tale of the man who bought a coat that proved to be moth-eaten, but could get no redress when he took it back to the shop.

"Moths?" said the salesman, spreading out his hands. "Vell, my friendt, in a coat at that price vat did you expect—humming birds?"

Long, long ago grandma had drawn a homely moral. If your coat is moth-eaten, mend up the holes and make as neat a job of it as you can. Don't whine, don't shirk, don't envy, don't expect too much. Be glad of health, and some looks, and a job. Be glad of a roof, of not being in debt. Count your mercies.

"Nobody has humming birds in their coats, if you come down to it," grandma said.

Posie, sitting late, with Guffy in her lap, counted her mercies valiantly.

V

THE next evening the woman in the mink coat rested her tray upon Posie's table for a brief moment after Posie had checked up.

"My dear, you look kind," she said. "Would you mind telling me how much you make a week?"

"Fifteen," said Posie readily, "and my meals. I've been here two years, ever since grandma and I came West."

"All you want to eat?"

"Plenty—and the very best!"

"I need a job," said the woman in the mink coat. "I'm hungry. I'm on the rocks. I'm pretty near done. Some nights I'm afraid to look at the gas stove in my room—for fear, you know—"

"Oh, no!" gasped Posie. "Don't say it! Don't think it! Just speak to Mr. Ross, the man who's carrying that lame lady's tray. I'm sure he will find something for you. You look so—so clever!"

"I used to think I was clever," said the woman slowly, "but I'm not. I'll try to speak to him to-night. Thank you! You have always smiled at me very sweetly."

Glancing shyly after her, Posie noticed that she looked different to-night. There was the same graceful walk, the same clear pallor, the same red-gold hair and scornful mouth, the same air of spurning things. She wore the same small brown hat, the same brown suede shoes. And then Posie, puzzling, caught her breath and had it. The mink coat was gone, and the woman wore a woolen scarf about the shoulders of her blue serge gown.

"Poor thing, afraid of a gas stove!" pronounced grandma, later. "And she's hocked her coat to pay her board bill, with the rains coming soon. Pneumonia or rheumatic fever! There was a fellow in the paper to-night tried to hock his mother-in-law's bulldog, and he got fourteen days for it, besides a bite in the leg."

Even after grandma was comfortably tucked in, with the hot bottle against her cold feet, she could not settle down. She threw off the eider down. She wanted the window up six inches and then down three.

"There's our room," she said gruffly. "We don't need the money for that room. We've got this house, and eleven hundred and thirty-three dollars in the bank, and our health, and your job, and each other. We're rich people, if you come down to it!"

"Yes, we're rich," said Posie; "but I'm sorry I told you about the woman. Now you won't sleep, grandma. It doesn't do to have as soft a heart as you've got."

"This bottle's so hot it's blisterin' the bed," growled the old lady.

"Somebody's got to be pretty soft, these days, to balance the scales at all!"

After that Posie looked carefully for the woman without the mink coat, but for some time she did not come. Then, one evening, she stopped beside the girl and rested her tray upon Posie's table. It was rather a pitiful little tray—just toast and a cup of coffee. It didn't take Posie an instant to check it. Then her eyes came up to the woman's worn, white face, and she saw that the thin lips were trembling.

"Her face rippled like water that's had wind across it, and she just slipped to the floor," Posie told grandma, afterward.

"Gosh!" said grandma. "Who caught her tray?"

"I did," said Posie; "and the boss happened to be near, and he picked her up and carried her into the rest room."

Posie was trembling herself as she gathered up the woman's hat and scarf and hand bag, at the boss's nod. The little procession threaded its way among the white-clad tables. Some heads turned to look, but there was no confusion. Miss Billings took Posie's place, Mary hurried in with a glass of cold water, and at length the woman on the rest room sofa opened her eyes and looked straight up into Posie's face.

"You're beautiful—and kind," she said weakly. "I dreamed of you the other night."

She closed her eyes again.

Soft-voiced, in the corner, Posie and the boss consulted together.

"She spoke to me about a job," said the boss; "but I had nothing immediate. I didn't realize—she looked well dressed. Down on her luck, you tell me?"

"Hungry," whispered Posie. "On the rocks."

"Out here to break into the movies, I suppose."

"And not breaking in," said Posie.

The boss and Posie nodded to each other, and the woman on the sofa stirred.

"Don't bother," she said. "Just ring for an ambulance and wash your hands of me. I've given up my room. It will have to be a hospital—or a jail!"

There fell a little hush upon the cafeteria rest room. The boss and Posie consulted silently together. The woman on the sofa lay very still. It was apparent that she had washed her hands of herself.

"Grandma and I have a room," decided

Posie. "If you'll let me off, I'll take her home with me, Mr. Ross."

"That's crazy, Posie!" said the boss. "She may be sick on your hands for weeks—a perfect stranger. Much better call in a cop."

"No," said Posie definitely. "Grandma and I were talking things over last night. I know grandma. She'd want me to, Mr. Ross."

The boss shrugged his shoulders, and brightened.

"Well, I'll send Mary in with some chicken broth," he conceded; "and the house will stand for the taxi, Posie."

As the woman without the mink coat walked slowly out of the cafeteria on the boss's arm, the band was playing a request number. Instinctively Posie glanced up at the placard, to see what it might happen to be, for she loved all music. She shivered as she stepped into the taxi. The request number had been "The Funeral March of a Marionette."

"We won't let her die, will we, grandma?" whispered Posie, late that night. "She wanted to pay for the taxi. She handed me her bag—eighty-nine cents in it, grandma—and when she saw the room and Great-Aunt Hannah Maria's sampler, and the log cabin quilt, she cried."

"Gosh, what a nuisance! I'll buy me a beef kidney to-morrow and make her some Scotch broth," muttered grandma crossly. "It must be as late as eleven o'clock. See if the stove's turned off tight, Posie."

"Yes'm," said Posie, pattering across, barefooted, to make sure, and pattering back to whisper again in grandma's ear. "And, grandma, her underclothes were beautiful—handmade, and monogrammed! She must have been rich or—or something, to have such things!"

"Likely a bad egg," muttered grandma bitterly. "Maybe a bootlegger, or a woman bandit. Sleeping under your great-grandmother's log cabin quilt! It's almost a joke, if you come down to it."

"And, grandma," whispered Posie, "there was a folding leather case in her hand bag. It opened up of itself. There was a man's picture, and a baby's. I tried not to look, but—"

"This bottle's so hot it 'll burn a hole in the sheet," opined grandma. "If you keep on blowin' into my ear, I'll get an earache!"

"We won't let her die, will we, grand-

ma? We'll help her, won't we? We'll get the doctor in the morning."

"Sittin' up as late as eleven o'clock at night and blowin' into my ear!"

"I did right, grandma, to bring her, didn't I?"

"Gosh, what a nuisance! There's Guffy cryin' to get in. Even the cat's upset!"

"I did right, didn't I?"

"I'd like to have anybody tell me how an East Hallam Macdonald could have done any different," acknowledged grandma, belligerently. "There—I knew you'd sneeze! Let Guffy in, and stop prancin' about. Your Uncle Daniel Bowers died of the whooping cough at the age of three."

The boss came up to Posie next evening, as the dinner crowd waned, and spoke out of one corner of his mouth.

"Don't appear to look," he said quietly; "but I think the man at the third table, by the railing, is a dick."

"What's a dick?" said Posie, taking in the man with a flick of her green eyes.

"Sleuth—special officer—detective," said the boss. "He's been asking me about two of our steadies. You know them—a tall young chap in gray and a black-haired little girl."

Posie raised one hand to her throat.

"Why them?" she just managed.

"He didn't say," said the boss; "but I gathered it might be a kidnaping case. It seems the kid belongs to rich people back East. Been missing two months. Name's sort of queer—Eulalia, or Eulalie. They've been stopping at the Biltmore, but have checked out. Haven't been here lately, have they?"

"Not lately," replied Posie breathlessly.

"It proves one thing to me," said the boss, smiling. "We get some of the hotel crowd as well—as *well*, Posie!"

"Why not?" said Posie.

"There you are," agreed the boss and went off smiling.

But Posie did not smile. It seemed to her, sitting there on her high chair, as if she might never smile again.

"Rich people back East"—"missing two months"—"Eulalie"—"the Biltmore"! What was the penalty for stealing a child?

Pete's face rose before her, rugged, worn, with lines across the forehead and a masterful mouth. Pete's eyes looked down upon her, deep-set, steady, brave. Sitting there on her high chair, Posie learned that

she loved him, that she had loved him from the beginning. The overwhelming fact swept her far from her moorings.

She swung down from her high chair and got her hat and jacket from the little closet beneath the staircase. Pulling on her hat, dragging on her jacket, she spoke over one shoulder to Mary.

"I've got to go home," she said. "Tell the boss, Mary."

"Are you sick, honey?" gaped Mary, at something strange in the girl's set face.

"No," said Posie. "Just—through, I guess. Good-by, Mary. Thank you for everything!"

Thus Posie, swept from her moorings.

VI

GOING home in the big trolley, she learned lesser additional facts. If Pete had stolen Eula, she, Posie, might lose him forever, but not so far, not so completely, as if Pete had not stolen Eula; for then he must belong to "rich people back East," he must stop at Biltmores habitually, he must belong to Eula and to her mother, who was—or had been—beautiful.

Sitting there on the big trolley, under the surge of this overwhelming fact, swept far from her moorings, Posie, an East Hallam Macdonald whose Great-Uncle Wade had been a missionary to Baluchistan—Posie Macdonald, with the tradition of New England spread like a dark old tapestry across the young wall of her life, sent up an innocent prayer.

"Please," prayed Posie, with her hands clasped tight together, "please—because it means my whole life to me, and because Thou seest through to the hearts of Thy stumbling children—please let Pete have stolen little Eula! Amen!"

Reaching home, she went straight to her desk. There was the address, as Pete had written it out for her—"Clift Hotel, San Francisco, until the 4th." Sitting at the desk, Posie tried to compose a telegram that no dick might understand.

Guffy, delicately exploring, stepped from the little desk to Posie's shoulder, rubbed a pink nose against her white sweater, and settled at length upon her lap. There came a low murmur of voices from the inner room. The clock struck nine. What was the penalty for stealing a child?

Grandma opened the closed door of the inner room and walked over to Posie at her desk. There was something strange about

grandma's face, thought Posie, but everything was strange to-night.

"Are you crying, grandma?" the girl asked dully.

"Maybe—I don't know," replied grandma. "Anyway, it don't matter; but I've—I've got some bad news for you, Posie."

"She's not dying?" breathed Posie.

"No—she's better. She'll do, the doctor says. What I've got to tell you—show you—I'd rather be strung up—look here!"

Grandma opened her wrinkled hand. Lying against it was a miniature—exquisite, ethereal, the filigree frame of it set with pearls. Posie caught her breath as she leaned close to look. Then for a space there was no sound.

"Eula!" Posie said at last. "Eula! She's—Eula's—mother!"

"Yes," said grandma, two tears creeping unnoticed down her wrinkled cheek. "She's what they came out here for, Posie. She's what they're looking for—up in San Francisco—now!"

The girl was trembling slightly, continuously. Her eyes had the look of a little creature, young and happy and free, that has been caught in a trap and is suffering; but her lips were folded in and her head was high.

"I'll have to change my telegram," she said, and tore the sheet across.

"You'll send for them?" stumbled grandma. "Right away—without even hesitating?"

"What else?" said Posie.

"What else, indeed?" thought grandma dearly, as the telephone rang.

What else—for an East Hallam Macdonald? What else to balance the scales at all—courage, straight dealing, honesty, against a girl's happiness? Grandma was not an East Hallam Macdonald herself. She had only married one.

The old lady hit her ankle bone against a rocker as she stumbled across to the telephone, but she did not know it, because she was defying the Macdonalds, Pete, Eula, Fate, anything and everything which might have brought that look into Posie's eyes. Grandma was arraigning the universe.

"Hello!" she barked into the telephone. "Wrong number, I suppose, at this time of night!"

But it happened not to be the wrong number, after all. It happened to be Pete calling Posie from the Biltmore.

For an instant the girl stood stunned, taking it in, and then she flew across the room and was at the telephone.

"Pete," she said exaltedly, not even hesitating at this supreme moment, "I have news for you—great news for you—wonderful news! Pete, your wife is here!"

"What? My wife?" came back from Pete incredulously.

"Yes—Eula's mother," said Posie. "Eula's mother is here with us. Yes, living here. She's been sick, but is better. The doctor says all she needs is time and building up. Yes, of course, I am sure. I *know*, Pete! She's beautiful—red-gold hair like a fairy princess, and until lately she wore a mink coat. There's no mistake, Pete! She has a miniature of Eula. Oh, our part of it isn't important. It just—happened. She fainted one night at the cafeteria, and I brought her home with me. Anybody else would have done the same. Yes—come right out—be sure to bring Eula—good-by!"

She looked exhausted. Her lips had lost their color. She sat down in the rocking-chair by the window, with Guffy in her arms. Grandma, hovering, brought her a glass of milk, but she pushed it away. When a car roared up the street, she put Guffy down gently and went to meet them.

It was a part of the strangeness of everything that they should not have come alone. The dark man who had asked about them at the cafeteria was with them—the man whom Mr. Ross had called a "dick." Stranger still, this man was carrying Eula in his arms as he strode up the walk.

Eula held out both hands to Posie, as usual, and hugged her close; but above the child's head Posie, looking at the dark man, saw that his eyes were wet with tears.

"Where is she?" he said harshly to Posie, the tears running, unheeded, down his face. "You're the young woman on the telephone—the girl who took her in? This is the place? Where is she, then? Where is my wife?"

VII

It was grandma who opened the door of the inner room for the dark man and Eula to pass through, and closed it quietly behind them.

Outside, Pete stood in the dim light of the little electric lantern, looking down at Posie. Posie, with wonder, with a dawning joy, looked up at Pete.

"There's no band here, wonderful one," said Pete, "but when I see you I want to sing. I want to give thanks. When I think of what you have done for my sister, I want to get down on my knees!"

"She's your sister, Pete? And she has been lost?"

"Lost to us," replied Pete. "She walked out one night into thin air, after a scene with Jim. Jim's a good fellow and a great surgeon, but he's high-strung. He rode rough-shod. I figured that she'd hit it for California and the films. That was merely logical. Pretty, no profession, thrown on her own, angry, spoiled—they all do it. I knew she'd starve in a gutter before she'd give in and crawl back. I'm very fond of my sister. I said nothing to Jim, but I stole Eula and came out here. I haunted hotels, cafeterias, studios. I banked on Eula to bring her back. Besides, the poor kid needed sunshine, shut up in a great city house with a muff of a snuffling governess. I'm a good deal of a children's specialist myself, Posie."

"A doctor?" breathed Posie. "A great doctor? A famous doctor?"

"Soso," said Pete; "but what of it? You've moved back two inches. You're leaning against the wall. Don't you *like* my being a doctor?"

"Are you rich, too, Pete?" breathed Posie.

"Soso," said Pete; "but what of it? Do you *want* to lean on that wall—when I'm here—as near as I can get—waiting? When I'm hungry for the feel of you, Posie? Don't you love me?"

"I love you," whispered Posie.

"Then come here," said Pete, with a swift, plunging look into the green eyes that shook Posie's very heartstrings, with a swift, sure movement that swept her into his arms. "Orange blossoms!" said Pete, with his lips on her hair. "Pearls—lace over your lovely head—grandma in gray satin to give you away! You were right, Posie—my wife is here!"

"Grandma," murmured Posie, "and—and Guffy—I'm all they've got! They couldn't stand New York, Pete. I couldn't let myself be happy, asking them to."

"What's New York?" said Pete, turning her about in his arms. "What's anything in the world besides this? California!" warned Pete, stooping swiftly close and reaching her lips with his. "California, here I come!"

An Angel Rushes In

A STORY OF THE INCALCULABLE CHANGES AND CHANCES OF
THEATRICAL LIFE

By Malcolm Douglas

WHEN a wily, unscrupulous theatrical promoter goes fishing for what is vulgarly known as a "sucker," he almost invariably baits his hook with a young and pretty woman.

Beatrice Garth was sufficiently seductive to tempt even the most gluttoned fish to bite. She was leading woman in the "Hearts Triumphant" company, which was making its way in the lumbering local train toward its next one-night stand, Acropolis. The members of the organization—eleven, all told—were in a demoralized condition, for business ever since they had been out on the road had been uniformly bad, and for the last two weeks salaries had been unpaid. They had been forced to lead a hand-to-mouth existence on the meager sums that Booker, the manager, had reluctantly doled out to them.

Booker still struggled desperately on, nursing the apparently forlorn hope that things would take a turn for the better. He had a play which gave satisfaction to the few who paid to see it, with a fairly capable company to interpret it; but his attraction, unfortunately, did not excite any preliminary interest in the places in which it was booked, and its receipts were something pitiable.

In the dingy day coach the faces of the players were as dark as the skies that hung low over the dreary, drenched landscape. The slanting rain that beat against the car windows destroyed whatever optimistic thought they had entertained of a good house that night, for people would not come out without some extraordinary inducement in such pneumonia-breeding weather.

Sharing the seat with Beatrice Garth was Elise Clare—a most unusual circumstance, for almost from the outset of the short, disastrous season there had been a marked

coldness between the two women, and they had avoided each other whenever it was possible. Their mutual dislike was undoubtedly due to the fact that each was secretly jealous of the other. Beatrice Garth was more beautiful than Elise Clare, but there was a warmth about the latter's face that her companion's somehow lacked.

In the play, Elise Clare had a small, inconsequential part that might easily have been eliminated by distributing the lines among other members of the cast; but though Beatrice Garth had the star rôle, and acquitted herself satisfactorily in it, Elise felt that she could do it much better. Beatrice, on her side, had an uneasy feeling that if the girl who sat beside her could get the chance she would outshine her; and for that reason the leading woman most cordially disliked her present companion.

Beatrice, who had been moodily watching the plashing raindrops streaming in tiny rivulets down the car window, turned to Elise Clare.

"Well," she said, "to-night will probably be the end. It was foolish of Booker to go on as long as this. He should have got us back to New York while he still had money. I suppose you're in the same condition as myself. Have you any one to help you?"

"No," was Elise's hopeless response. "Oh, it's terrible to be left without a cent in some strange place among people who don't care what becomes of you!"

Beatrice Garth's lips compressed in a hard, bitter smile. The train, with slackening speed, was pulling into the depressing, mist-shrouded outskirts of Acropolis. When it came to a stop at the station, the rain was still steadily falling, and the company dispersed in the downpour to seek hotel accommodations.

Later, in a room overlooking the public square, Beatrice gave a cursory glance at the conventional drab surroundings—a faithful replica of others she had encountered in one-night stands—the bed, the wardrobe, the washstand, the single chair, the faded carpet, and the solitary steel engraving in the buckeye frame upon the papered wall. She deposited her grip on the chair without emptying its contents, and started down the stairs. She had noticed that the telegraph office occupied the ground-floor corner of the dingy brick building, and she made her way to it.

In sole possession of the office was an unusually good-looking, smooth-shaven man in his late twenties. He was decidedly well groomed, and his clothes carried the conviction that they had been made by some expensive city tailor.

He stared at Beatrice Garth, and she had the pleasurable consciousness that he was impressed by her beauty. She flashed him a look from her eyes—the look that carried so well across the footlights.

"I'd like to send a telegram," she said.

"Why, the operator isn't here at present," he replied, with some embarrassment. "I'm just a friend of his, that's all. He stepped out into the hotel for a moment. If you'll wait, I'll get him for you."

"If you'll be so kind," she murmured, still transfixed him with her eyes.

He left her, and in a few minutes returned, accompanied by an anæmic-looking, stoop-shouldered young man with heavily rimmed tortoise-shell spectacles. Beatrice Garth had scribbled on a blank the few words of her message.

"Please rush it," was her instruction. "Send it collect."

"Excuse me, miss," said the operator, "but I'll have to have some guarantee that the charges will be paid."

"Oh, that's all right, Jenks," interjected his companion hastily, and turned to Beatrice Garth. "You're with the troupe that's to be at the opera house to-night, are you not?"

"Yes," she said. "I'm the leading lady—Beatrice Garth."

"My name's Hargrave, Miss Garth," volunteered her questioner, "and I'm one of the townspeople. We're not very good theatergoers here in Acropolis, I'm afraid, but I trust you'll have a packed house to-night. I certainly shan't miss the performance myself."

"Thank you," she said, with a radiant smile, and addressed her next remark to the gaping Jenks. "I'm stopping at the hotel in the same building as this, and I'll appreciate it very much if you'll let me know when the answer comes."

Then she swept out with the regal carriage that she found so effective on the stage.

"A beautiful young woman!" was Hargrave's impulsive comment.

"Up against it, too, I guess," said Jenks. "She's wiring some one for a hundred."

Hargrave seated himself, and lit a cigar. "If you don't mind," he said, "I'll hang around a bit. I'm curious to know if she gets it."

At the end of two hours he was still in his chair, and had lit a second and a third cigar. Finally the telegraph key began to click off a message.

"Here's the answer now," said Jenks. "Just two words—'Nothing doing.' Pretty raw, I should call it. If he had to refuse her, he might at least have done it in a half decent way."

Hargrave took some bills from his pocketbook.

"I'll tell you what I want you to do, Jenks," he said. "Just substitute for that message: 'Am wiring you a hundred.' Here's the money."

He rose to go, and Jenks began to type the words he had directed.

Hargrave had been gone only a short time when Beatrice Garth entered the telegraph office.

"Has an answer come yet?" was her anxious inquiry.

"Here it is," said Jenks.

He placed an envelope in her hands. She quickly tore open the flap, and her eye ran over the contents. The doubt that had shadowed her pretty face changed suddenly to swift relief.

"The money's been sent!" was her elated cry.

"Here it is," said Jenks.

With a cryptic smile he handed her one hundred dollars.

II

UNDER most discouraging weather conditions a sparse assemblage was attracted by the performance of "Hearts Triumphant" at the opera house in Acropolis that night. Hargrave was one of the undaunted few. Beatrice Garth's beauty

had made an impression on him which was intensified when he saw Her on the stage, even under such depressing circumstances. He was charmed by the rich, velvety quality of her voice and thrilled by the magnetic flash of her eyes. She noticed him almost from the moment of her first entrance among the pitiful handful in the orchestra chairs, and a faint smile of recognition curved her lips.

As the first act proceeded, Hargrave grew indignant that Acropolis was so niggardly in its patronage of these visiting artists. What he had already seen showed that the play was a good one, and well presented. The bad weather was not a sufficient excuse for such a wretched attendance. It was safe to say that the cheap motion picture place near by was packed at that very moment.

When the curtain fell on the act, he went out to the manager's office. Jameson, who ran the opera house, was counting up the receipts with the company manager, Booker. When the former saw Hargrave, he smiled up at him genially.

"Come in, Mr. Hargrave," he said. "Mr. Booker, let me introduce you to Mr. George Hargrave."

Booker sprang from his chair to grasp the visitor's hand.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Booker," said Hargrave. "I'm out in front, enjoying the show immensely. I'm sorry you've got such a poor audience to-night, though. I'm sure that if you came again you'd crowd 'em in."

"That's what they all say," was Booker's acrimonious remark. "The piece gives satisfaction wherever we go. If we'd come with a New York reputation, I suppose we'd have turned 'em away. I've got a good play here, Mr. Hargrave, and a fine company, but I guess one would need the twelve disciples to do any business in this burg!"

"I don't blame you for feeling as you do," said Hargrave. "The theatrical game must be very trying at times. Still, I judge it has its compensations, too. I've often thought I'd like to take a little flyer in it myself."

"You have?" said Booker, with almost painful eagerness. "Well, if you really mean it, now's your chance. I've got a play here that ought to clean up a fortune. The only trouble is that it's never had the proper backing. I took it out on a shoe-

string. If I could get the time, I'll bet it would run a whole year in New York."

"Maybe we can do business together, Mr. Booker. I'm particularly impressed by Miss Garth. She's a fine actress and a beautiful young woman."

"Ah, yes—Beatrice!" said Booker, with enthusiasm. "She's my discovery. If any of the big producers happens to see her, he'll grab her quick. Mark my words, Mr. Hargrave—some day that girl will be the talk of New York. Maybe you'd like to meet her. If so, I'll take you behind the scenes."

"I'll be delighted to go with you," replied Hargrave. "I'd like to tell Miss Garth personally how much I admire her performance."

"Very well, then," said Booker. "We'll go to her dressing room. A little praise from a man like you will mean a great deal to her."

To the noisy din of the ill balanced orchestra, he led Hargrave down a shadowy side aisle, past an untenanted private box, to the stage. Both elbowed their way through groups of overalled grips slouchily setting the scene for the next act, until they came to a door marked with a red star.

"Come in!" they heard a voice say, in response to Booker's knock.

They entered the room. Beatrice Garth, already in her second act gown, sat in a chair, critically inspecting her face in the small glass just above the make-up shelf, while she added a final touch to her penciled brows. She turned as the two men approached her, and smilingly rose to greet them.

"Let me introduce Mr. Hargrave, Miss Garth," said Booker. "Mr. Hargrave's out in front, and he says he's enjoying your work immensely."

"I'm so glad!" she said, and Hargrave thrilled at the pressure of her hand. "Mr. Hargrave and I met this afternoon."

"Indeed?" said Booker, in surprise.

"Just casually," explained Hargrave. "I'm sorry, Miss Garth, there are not more people here to-night to appreciate your work. You're simply charming, and all the more so because you don't let down with so few in the house. You act just as if it were crowded."

"That's because Miss Garth is a true artist," chimed in Booker. "She lives the part, forgetful of everything else. Mr.

Hargrave likes the theatrical business, Miss Garth. I hope to interest him in 'Hearts Triumphant.'

"Very possibly you can do so," added Hargrave.

"How lovely!" cried Beatrice effusively. "The play's a sure winner, Mr. Hargrave. All it needs is just such a business man as I'm sure you are. Oh, I do hope you two men can come together! I can assure you that I, for one, would be delighted to have you make one of our happy little family, Mr. Hargrave."

Just then a voice outside shouted:

"Curtain's up, Miss Garth! Hurry, or you'll be late for your scene!"

"I'm sorry I must leave you," said Beatrice. "Do try to induce Mr. Booker to part with an interest in the play, Mr. Hargrave! If you joined us, I'm sure we'd be great friends!"

Again came the soft pressure of her hand that made George Hargrave's blood tingle, and she walked rapidly out of the room, creating a faint, intoxicating breeze of perfumed femininity. The two men followed slowly after her.

"Well, do you want to talk business?" Booker rather abruptly inquired.

"Let's see the next act first," was Hargrave's response.

They took seats in a box.

On the stage Beatrice Garth had begun a scene with the leading man, Bevis. During one of his speeches she muttered to him, in an aside:

"Booker's got a sucker nibbling at his hook. See 'em out there in the box?"

She glibly took up her answering speech on the cue, while Bevis responded, in an aside:

"I hope he lands him!"

Both played the scene with great spirit, and what the audience lacked in numbers it made up in enthusiasm. The act steadily grew in interest, and at its climax there came a vociferous burst of applause. First Bevis and Beatrice Garth took a curtain call, then the entire company, then Bevis and Beatrice Garth again. Still the audience was insistent, and to the unmistakable demand Beatrice Garth appeared and graciously bowed an acknowledgment.

"It's that way all over!" cried Booker, with pride. "She's a wonderful young woman! Wherever she goes, she knocks 'em off their feet. Of course, she's got the lines. The play's a corker!"

The tumult had died out, and a few young men were groping their way up the aisles for the inevitable cigarette. Hargrave turned to Booker.

"What have you got to propose?" he asked.

"There's a fortune in this play, Mr. Hargrave," said Booker, in a husky, strained tone. "Under ordinary circumstances I wouldn't let go of any part of it, but the fact is that I've got some pressing obligations to meet, and the only way I can do it is to sacrifice a piece of the show. I'll let you in on the ground floor, Mr. Hargrave. I'll sell you a half interest in 'Hearts Triumphant' for five thousand dollars."

He waited nervously for the other man to speak. In the brief interval of silence he licked his dry lips with his tongue several times.

"I don't want to buy a half interest in the show, Mr. Booker," at last came Hargrave's response. "With me it would be all or nothing; but before you set a figure on it you might as well be perfectly frank with me. Your investment may be considerable, but at the present moment your holding isn't worth thirty cents. How much do you owe?"

"Well, I owe the company two weeks' back salaries," Booker reluctantly acknowledged.

"What else?"

"I haven't paid the author any royalties yet," confessed Booker. "Yes, and I owe some printing bills."

"The truth is, Mr. Booker," said Hargrave, "you're fast on the rocks, and you will be lucky if you salvage anything from the wreck; but I'm willing to help you. I'll take over the show and assume all your debts, without even knowing what they are."

"That leaves me high and dry," complained Booker. "To tell the truth, I haven't even the money to pay my fare back to New York."

"Make your mind easy on that point," was Hargrave's assurance. "I'll give you a thousand for yourself. That ought to be enough to start you again."

"All right—I'll do it!" spoke up Booker quickly.

"Very well, then," said Hargrave. "At what time is the company going to leave to-morrow?"

"We were to take the eleven o'clock

train," replied Booker. "We're booked to play Danville, and it's a short jump."

"That's good," said Hargrave. "It'll give us time to complete the deal. You can make out a bill of sale, with a list of all you owe. I'll meet you and the company an hour before train time, with plenty of cash to satisfy all demands."

The curtain went up on the third act, and Hargrave again became interested in the play. Booker would have liked to continue the discussion of certain details, but he met with no encouragement, and relapsed into moody silence.

"Is Miss Garth married?" Hargrave suddenly inquired.

"Why, no," was Booker's response.

"Do you happen to know if she has any attachment?"

"Only for her art," said Booker. "Miss Garth is as pure as she is beautiful and gifted. The breath of scandal has never touched her. She seems perfectly indifferent to the attentions of men."

Hargrave, just then, was absorbed in watching Beatrice Garth. Booker stared at him, and muttered to himself, with a slight sneer on his lips:

"So that's the cause of all this philanthropy, eh? He's stuck on that skirt!"

III

MINUS Booker, but plus Hargrave, the "Hearts Triumphant" company proceeded jubilantly to its next stand. The bad weather had given way to blue skies and dazzling sunshine, and the spirits of all had risen with the barometer. Every one, monetarily speaking, was perfectly at ease, thanks to a ministering angel who most unexpectedly had dropped from heaven into their very midst.

At Danville the advance sale was surprisingly good, and "Hearts Triumphant" was presented to a packed house that night. This was partly accounted for by the fact that there was in progress at the time a convention which had attracted a considerable number of strangers; but in the next town, under normal conditions, business was encouraging, and in the third it was excellent.

Hargrave had some ideas of his own that he desired to put into effect as soon as possible. He wired the advance agent, Biller, to join him for a conference, and the purveyor of publicity doubled back on his tracks to meet his new employer.

Biller received his instructions and went on his way, and Hargrave waited curiously for the outcome in the first town in which his ideas would be carried out. When he reached it, he was not disappointed. The whole place was agog with interest over the coming of the show, and its advance sale was heavy. That night it played to more than nine hundred dollars, and Hargrave felt pardonably elated.

The same story of success was repeated without a break each night for the ensuing week, with "S. R. O." in several instances, and the show began to turn a handsome profit. Its success was noised about, and managers of theaters began to telegraph for dates.

Hargrave's friendship for Beatrice Garth was growing more pronounced. On railroad trips from town to town they nearly always shared a seat together. In every way she encouraged his attentions, and exercised all her arts upon him. He confided his plans to her, and she professed a great delight in his achievements.

"Oh, I think you're simply wonderful!" she once said. "It's fine, the way you've taken hold of this play and made it the success it is! It would undoubtedly have gone to smash in Acropolis if it hadn't been for you."

"No," cried Hargrave, smiling at her enthusiasm. "I really don't think I've done anything so very remarkable. It's a good play, and all it needed was a little boosting."

Beatrice looked at him admiringly. When she spoke again, there was a slight embarrassment in her tone.

"There's something I'd like to say, Mr. Hargrave," she began, "but it's rather difficult to approach. As long as the play was losing, I've kept silence; but now that it's making money, I feel I should speak. Yes, because I really think I've helped it to success."

"You certainly have," agreed Hargrave gallantly. "Without you there would have been nothing to work on. After we get the people in, we must give them something to satisfy them, and I'm sure you're abundantly satisfying. What's on your mind, Miss Garth? You can always speak freely to me."

"When I signed with Booker," said Beatrice, gathering courage as she went on, "I took a cut in my salary. I accepted a hundred and twenty-five a week, because

I liked the part and believed I could do something with it; but Booker agreed that if the play proved a success, he'd give me my regular salary, two hundred dollars. Of course, he's out of it now, but if he were with it still I'm sure he would keep his promise."

"In taking over the play, Miss Garth," replied Hargrave, "I told Booker I would assume all his obligations, and this I consider one of them. From now on your salary will be two hundred dollars a week."

"Oh!" said Beatrice, in a voice that thinly veiled the exultation she felt. "You won't think me mercenary, will you? If I thought you did, I'd rather have things remain just as they are. Your friendship is worth more to me than all the money in the world!"

"Make your mind easy on that point," Hargrave assured her. "To tell you the truth, Miss Garth, I had decided to raise your salary before you spoke. You're worth every cent of the two hundred."

A few seats farther back in the car were Bevis and Elise Clare.

"Our manager and his leading lady seem to be getting on famously," Elise remarked.

"Well, at least *she* is," replied Bevis. "I judge she's just been holding him up. From that look on her face she's got away with it!"

IV

THE "Hearts Triumphant" company continued its tour with almost invariable success, working farther and farther West, until it reached Carlinville. There it had the usual packed house, and the audience was particularly demonstrative.

After the performance Beatrice Garth left the theater in a well satisfied state of mind. She had been in the mood to play her part better than she ordinarily did, and her efforts had been received with genuine enthusiasm.

She had been in her room at the hotel only a short time when she heard a knock. With her brow contracted by a frown, she went to the door and opened it. A bell boy stood outside, with a card clutched in his grimy hand.

"There's a gent, miss, down in the ladies' parlor, waitin' to see you," he announced. "He told me to give you this."

"I can't come down!" was Beatrice's petulant response. "I'm too tired to see anybody!"

Nevertheless she took the card. The name she read upon it caused her to start as if she had suddenly received an electric shock.

The name of George Lake was one to conjure with. Its fortunate possessor owned or controlled theaters in many cities, and each season made a large number of productions.

"Wait!" she added, as the boy started to slouch off down the hall. "Tell him I won't detain him a minute. I'll be right down."

She ran to the mirror and gave her face a few artistic dabs with her powder puff. Then she rode down in the lift to the sepulchral surroundings where her caller was impatiently awaiting her.

She saw a short, overfed man whose face was of a pronounced Semitic cast, with an unduly prominent nose. The purple tinge on his cheeks and jaw would have quickly blossomed to beard without the twice-a-day restraint of a razor.

As the young woman came toward him, Lake's shrewd, ferretlike eyes appraised her from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet.

"Mr. Lake!" gasped Beatrice, as she clutched the plump hand that he patronizingly extended to her. "Is it indeed you?"

"Then you've heard of me, eh, little girl?" he said.

"Heard of you!" she echoed. "Why, everybody's heard of you!"

"Yes, I guess that's right," he said complacently. "I've made the name of George Lake a household word; but I'm not usin' it here. In fact, I never use it wherever I go. I always travel in-cog-ni-to. If I did not, the opposition would crab the game. I'm registered at this bum hotel under my right name—Isaac Ginsberg."

"What brought you here from New York?" she asked, in wonder.

"Why, you did," came the entirely unexpected response. "I sat through your performance to-night, an' I got to hand it to you. You're the goods, all right! You get everything there is to the part out of it, an' never lose a trick. You got genius, I tell you, little girl, an' I guess I know genius when I see it. I've dug up a whole lot of stage geniuses. I can spot 'em every time!"

"Oh, thank you!" she cried, in an ecstasy of delight. "You can't imagine how

much I appreciate those words, Mr. Lake! Your praise means more to me than all the elegant press notices I've received. The opinion of a man like yourself is worth having, for you stand at the very head of the profession. It's my dream to be some day under your management!"

"Well, that's what I've come to talk about," was his pleasant revelation. "I ain't here just to throw vi'lets an' orchards at you, Miss Garth. No, it's business that's brought me. I've heard about your work, an' I've made this trip just to get a line on you. Are you bound up to your present manager? Has he got you on a contract by which he can hold you?"

"Why, no," she said eagerly. "I can jump him at any time."

"That's good!" replied Lake. "We got to be fair an' honorable, even if we don't get nothin' by it. It's just this way, Miss Garth—I got a play I'm crazy to produce. I've had it a long time, an' my option on it's goin' to expire soon. I ain't done it because up to now I ain't found the woman I want for the leadin' part; but I think you could get away with it. If me an' you can come to terms, I'll put it in rehearsal at once."

"Why, I'm sure we can come to terms," she said, with a fast beating heart. "What salary will you give me?"

"Five hundred a week," Lake promptly replied. "Come with me, an' I'll make a big woman out of you. I'll boom you so you'll be the talk of all New York. I'll put your name in electric letters two feet high on the marquee of my Frivolity Theater. Yes, an' I'll feature you in all the billin' an' newspaper advertisements. The play's goin' to be a knock-out, an' no one knows better 'n me what knock-outs are. I've picked out knock-outs all my life!"

"Oh, I'll come with you, Mr. Lake!" cried Beatrice, almost hysterically. "Yes, and I'll do anything you say. I don't know how to tell you how grateful I am to you. I can't thank you enough. Why, this is the opportunity I've been waiting for, striving for, hoping for, and it's come to me at last! I can hardly believe it's true. I'm afraid I'll wake up and find it's only a dream!"

"No," he hastened to assure her, "it's the straight goods, all right. You ain't doped, little girl. If I had a blank contract with me, I'd fill it out right now. You

don't need no contract with me, for my word's as good as my bond; but I guess I'd better have one with you. You can come to me just as soon as you reach New York, an' I'll make it out. When you're at my office, I'll hand you the part, so you can get busy on it at once."

"When do you want me to come?" she breathlessly asked.

"Well, every day counts," he said significantly. "Now I guess we'll call the meetin' adjourned. Everything's satisfactory to both sides, an' we understand each other. I got to ketch the early mornin' train, so I better hit the hay. Good night, little girl! There's no use wishin' you pleasant dreams, for you're sure to have 'em. You got what every ambitious young woman on the stage is prayin' for—you're with George Lake, an' you're made!"

He patted her hand paternally, and she returned to her room, to abandon herself to the pleasant thoughts inspired by this fortunate meeting.

At the hotel desk, the next morning, she made guarded inquiries for Mr. Isaac Ginsberg. She learned from the clerk that the gentleman had paid his bill and gone. None of her fellow members of the company had the slightest inkling that the famous theatrical magnate had witnessed the performance of "Hearts Triumphant" the night before.

Beatrice Garth had fully decided to leave immediately, without the customary two weeks' notice. She traveled with the company to the next stand, and on the train, when Hargrave joined her, she plunged into the announcement of her plans with brutal, desperate haste.

"I'm sorry to say I've got to leave you," she began.

"What do you mean?" he asked, in great surprise. "I don't understand you."

"I mean that I'm going to give up my position in your company."

"Why, what's wrong?" was his anxious inquiry. "Has there been anything to offend you? If so, I'm sure it can be straightened out. You know, Beatrice, I'd do anything to please you."

It was the first time he had called her by that name, and it fell unconsciously from his lips.

"Yes, I'm sure you would," she said complacently. "You've been just perfectly lovely to me, and that's what makes leaving you so hard; but I've had another

offer—one that I absolutely can't refuse. It's from Mr. Lake."

"Lake! Who's he?"

"Why, haven't you ever heard of Mr. Lake?" she asked, with pity in her tone. "I thought everybody knew about him. He's one of the biggest managers in the country. He has theaters in New York and other cities, and makes a lot of productions each year. Mr. Lake's going to star me in a new piece that's to open in New York, and he's to give me five hundred dollars a week."

"Five hundred dollars a week!" repeated Hargrave, his face slightly paling. "I hope you haven't finally closed with him. I'll give you five hundred dollars a week myself."

"Yes," she said, "I'm positive you would; but oh, Mr. Hargrave, can't you see it's not the money that's in question? It's my art, and that's my life, my very soul! I've heard that opportunity knocks at every one's door once, and only once. Well, now that it's knocked at mine, I'd be a fool not to listen. I have a chance to create the leading rôle in a play by a great author. Mr. Lake thinks I'm the only woman in the world who can do it. It will make me famous overnight!"

"Sometimes, when people think they recognize opportunity, it's a case of mistaken identity," was his rejoinder. "In deciding your action have you thought of the duty you owe to others? Now, mind, I'm not considering myself, for with me it doesn't matter as far as money is concerned; but if you accept this offer it means the disbanding of the company—yes, throwing out of work a number of people who might have gone along comfortably the whole season. Of course, you know very well I can't get along without you."

"Yes, I realize that," she said. "I'm necessary to the piece, I know; but I've got to think of myself."

"Beatrice, I believe you know why I undertook the management of this play," he went on. "If you don't, I'll tell you. When I saw you in the telegraph office at Acropolis, I was attracted to you. I felt sorry for you, because you seemed to be down and out."

"I wasn't down and out," she retorted. "I wired to New York for money, and got it."

"Yes, you got it," he said quietly, "and I was glad of it. When I watched you on

the stage that night, you can't imagine how much I admired you. I felt an irresistible desire to be near you, to be friends with you. Yes, Beatrice, it was solely because of you that I went into this play and tried to pull it out of the hole. I think these few weeks with you have been the happiest of my whole life, for all the while I have believed that you cared for me. Yes, I have thought that you might even care enough to be my wife."

"Your wife!" she echoed, with a harsh laugh. "Why, I've got a husband already that I'd like to get rid of! Do you think I'm fool enough to load myself up with another?"

He looked at her in surprise.

"Booker told me you were single," he said.

"Booker was a liar," she said. "He was fishing for a sucker, and used me for his bait."

Hargrave sprang to his feet.

"A sucker!" he repeated.

Beatrice gazed up at him with an amused expression on her face.

"Yes, a sucker," she said, with unnecessary emphasis. "What else would you call yourself?"

"That's enough," replied Hargrave, controlling himself by an effort. "We'll end this discussion right now."

Beatrice shrugged her shoulders indifferently, and he strode off into the adjoining car, where he stayed for the remainder of the journey. The rest of the day he kept apart from her, utterly careless as to what she might choose to do. He shut himself up in his room at the hotel, and did not go to the theater.

It was nearing eight o'clock when he heard a ring at the telephone.

"Mr. Hargrave!" The agitated voice of his stage manager, McIlvaine, was borne to him on the wire. "We're in trouble. Can you come to the theater at once?"

"I'll be right over," he said, and hung up the receiver.

He jammed his hat on his head, and walked swiftly to the theater, with a prescience of just what the trouble was. He found his way to the stage, where the members of the company, all ready to go on, were gathered in little flurried groups. McIlvaine rushed toward him with a worried air.

"We're in a fix. Miss Garth isn't here!" said the stage manager.

"Maybe she's at her hotel," replied Hargrave. "Have you tried to locate her?"

"I've located her all right," said McIlvaine grimly. "She took the seven o'clock train back to New York!"

McIlvaine thought that the other man received the news rather phlegmatically.

"Yes," said Hargrave, "she told me she meant to leave the company; but I had no idea she was going to quit this way. There is nothing else to do but to dismiss the audience and give the people back their money."

Bevis, the leading man, had joined them.

"No, don't do that," he broke in. "Let's give the performance."

"Impossible!" said Hargrave. "How are you going to do it without Miss Garth?"

"Miss Clare can play the part," replied Bevis earnestly. "She's letter-perfect in it. I've rehearsed it with her a number of times. I'll stake my life she can play it all around Miss Garth. The lines she now has don't amount to much, and the rest of us can fake 'em."

Hargrave looked at Elise Clare, who stood close by. He had never given her any particular attention during the weeks he had spent with the company. Now for the first time he was suddenly struck by the wistful, appealing look upon her face. Somehow it affected him strangely.

"Won't you please give me this chance, Mr. Hargrave?" she asked in a pleading tone. "I've heard that opportunity—"

"Yes, yes!" was his irritable interruption. "That's what Miss Garth told me on the train!"

Elise looked at him wonderingly.

"She's going to have her chance, so why shouldn't you have yours?" he went on. "Yes, you can play the part. You can't do any harm, for that's been done already. Go on, and do your best—or worst!"

So Elise Clare went on and played the part, and Hargrave, watching her from the wings, had the surprise of his life. She played it far better than Beatrice Garth had ever done. She put her very heart and soul into it, investing it with a pathetic quality that it had never known before. She brought out lights and shades that had hitherto lain hidden, and made lines sparkle like jewels. The audience went wild over her performance, recalled her again and again, and gave her greater applause than Beatrice Garth had ever received.

Behind the curtain, at the play's close, the actors crowded around the girl and showered effusive compliments upon her. Now that the ordeal was over, she was weak and faint from the excitement. Hargrave broke through their midst and caught both her trembling hands, holding them in his own in a grasp more eloquent than words.

"My child," he said, with feeling, "I had meant to close the tour, and send you all back to your homes; but you have saved the day. We will go on!"

V

BEATRICE GARTH reached New York on the following morning, and taxied to the feverish, pulsing Forties. The building before which the machine stopped was an out-of-date brownstone structure whose proprietor, keenly alive to the prevailing high rents, had rejuvenated it into so-called modern apartments of little boxlike rooms.

There was a highly ornate vestibule, but no elevator, and Beatrice Garth panted up the stairway to the landing on the third floor. She fumbled with a key at a lock. When she opened the door, a big, hulking figure of a man suddenly popped out from the bathroom. He was in his trousers and undershirt. There were dabs of lather on his cheeks, while on his arm lay a rather soiled towel.

He surveyed Beatrice Garth in astonishment.

"Hello, is it you?" he cried. "I thought it might be some one trying to break in. So the show blew up, eh? Well, you got back all right, after all!"

He wiped off the lather, disclosing a good-looking but coarse-featured face marred by little blotches of high color, probably superinduced by overindulgence in alcohol. Beatrice returned his look with one of great frigidity.

"No," she said, "the company didn't disband. It's doing a big business; but I came back, anyhow."

"Fired, eh?" he said.

"No, I wasn't fired," she said resentfully. "On the contrary, I was offered five hundred a week to stay; but I had other fish to fry."

She walked gingerly along the narrow private hall, and the man slouched after her. Going into the front room, she set her valise upon a heavily upholstered chair. The place had a stale, sickening odor of

liquor and tobacco smoke. Ashes were scattered all over the dull, lusterless floor, and in corners little fluffy, feathery balls had gathered. The center table and chairs were ridged with dust and dirt.

With a disgusted survey of the surroundings Beatrice burst out, in a sudden gust of passion:

"I've a good mind to go over to the Ritz, and let you wallow alone in all this filth!"

"So it's as good as that, eh?" he said sarcastically.

"Yes, it's as good as that," his wife returned. "I didn't need the hundred dollars you sent me."

"Now you needn't be sore about it," he said uncomfortably. "When I got your wire, I was clean broke. Yes, and I'm getting deeper and deeper into the hole. I've been posted at the club for back dues, and I suppose I'll be expelled, if I don't come across. I've been playing rummy in the hope of making a stake, but I've had infernal luck, and now I can't take a hand, because the other fellows have shut down on my I. O. U's."

"Do you mean to tell me you haven't worked since I've been away?" she indignantly demanded.

"Why, you know very well my salary's three hundred," he replied, with an injured air. "I got it once, and I won't take a cut. The only thing I've been able to get is an occasional job as an extra in a motion-picture studio. That's only five dollars a day, but they're voting at the union on demanding seven."

"You're a lazy, good-for-nothing loafer, Jim Garth!" she cried furiously. "I wish I'd never seen your face!"

"So do I," he said, with equal fervor. "There's something wrong with economic conditions when it takes only a couple of dollars to be married and over a thousand to get divorced. I know why you're in this angelic frame of mind. You're hot because I didn't send you that hundred when you wired for it."

"You didn't send it?" she gasped.

"Of course I didn't. How could I?"

"But I got it!"

"You got it?" he repeated. "Then what are you squawking about?"

She made no further attempt to solve this confusing problem. With a look of withering contempt she went over to the telephone in a corner of the room. The

directory lay on the floor beneath it, and, picking up the book, she began to thumb over its rumpled pages.

"Now what are you going to do?" he asked suspiciously.

"Why, telephone, you fool!" was her angry retort.

"Then it's mighty lucky you showed up to-day," he said. "They're going to take the telephone out to-morrow, because the rent for it hasn't been paid for the last two months."

With the receiver at her ear, she called through the transmitter:

"Chickering 9246, please!"

Jim Garth waited curiously while she listened. In another moment she gabbled vivaciously on:

"Is this you, Mr. Lake? It's Miss Garth, Mr. Lake—Beatrice Garth. Yes, I've just got back to town. Oh, you don't mean it! Why, I'll be charmed, I'm sure! Yes, yes, I'll be right over!"

She hung up.

"Was that George Lake you were talking to?" asked Jim, in great surprise.

"Yes," was her response.

"What does he want with you?"

"Oh, nothing much," she said, with affected carelessness. "He's engaged me at five hundred a week—that's all. I'm to create the leading rôle in the new piece he's going to do at the Frivolity."

Instantly her husband's manner underwent a complete change. In the winning, ingratiating tones he considered so effective in his affairs with women, he said:

"Now look here, girly, what's the use of our chewing the rag in this way, when we love each other so?"

"Oh, can that guff!" she replied disgustedly. "It won't get you anywhere. If you think you can get your hooks on my salary, let me tell you that you've got another think coming!"

She went to her room, and, after a most painstaking make-up, left the apartment. The Frivolity Theater, in which Lake had offices, was in the immediate neighborhood, just off Broadway.

Upon her arrival there Beatrice Garth was promptly ushered into the great man's presence. He sat at an elaborate rosewood desk in an aura of smoke created by the fat cigar in his mouth. Opposite him, in a comfortable leather-padded chair, was his physical antithesis—a man tall and sparsely built, with a high forehead protruding

from a rather pallid, ascetic-looking face crowned by a thick thatch of hair.

As Beatrice Garth entered the room, Lake sprang up with a look of genuine pleasure and warmly grasped her hand.

"So you're here, Miss Garth!" he cried. "Well, I'm delighted to see you!" Turning to his companion, he explained: "Skribble, this is Miss Beatrice Garth, the young lady I've engaged to create the part!"

Skribble screwed to one of his eyes the monocle that dangled from the lapel of his frock coat, and took a dispassionate inventory of the young woman.

"The type," he finally said, but without the slightest show of enthusiasm. "Ah, yes—the type!"

Lake beamed on Beatrice Garth.

"I got your contract all made out," he announced. "All you got to do is sign it. It's for the run of the piece, with an option on your future services for eight hundred a week. Most of the cast's already engaged, an' all I got to do is fill in. Your part's here in a drawer of my desk, an' you better get busy on it. Now you're back, we can start rehearsals at once. We ought to put the play on in three weeks."

With the signed contract and the manuscript of her part in her bag, Beatrice left the office shortly afterward.

In a few days the rehearsals of "A Fatal Passion" began on the bare stage of the Frivolity Theater. They were strenuous, back-breaking affairs, with long morning and afternoon sessions, separated by only brief intervals for lunch.

After one of these nerve-racking functions, when the opening night was near, Beatrice happened to run against Biller, the advance agent of "Hearts Triumphant," on Broadway. Rather uncouth he was, but a hustling, bustling little chap who prided himself on being what is known as a "live wire."

Biller would have passed her without recognition, but Beatrice was too curious to notice the studied affront. She planted herself directly before him, so that he was forced to come to a standstill.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Biller?" she said, with an excess of cordiality. "What are you doing back on Broadway?"

"Oh, I'm just here on a little business matter—that's all," was his cold response.

"I suppose the show closed right after I left it?"

"No—it's still out, and doing a bigger business than ever. We're playing to capacity everywhere. This week we're in Pennsylvania. Two nights ago, in Altoona, we got over seventeen hundred dollars."

Beatrice Garth bit her lip.

"Who's playing my part?" she asked.

"Why, Elise Clare."

"What, that little hussy?"

"Yes, and she's got you skinned a mile, and then some. The boss is nuts over her. I shouldn't wonder if those two would hit it off pretty soon. Why, he's even more stuck on her than he was on you!"

VI

THE night of the first performance of the new play finally arrived. When dusk fell, the electric lights before the Frivolity Theater blazed with the fiery announcement:

A FATAL PASSION

with Beatrice Garth

The typical overdressed and underdressed audience of a metropolitan first night gathered to pass judgment on the offering. When the curtain fell on the first act, to perfunctory applause, the holders of orchestra seats hastily repaired to the rear of the house, to engage in staccato comments of a critical sort.

The second act failed to arouse any degree of enthusiasm, and the third met with even a worse reception. Before the last act was over, people began clambering out of their seats and decamping in appalling numbers, and the curtain fell on a half deserted auditorium.

The next morning, at an unusually early hour, Beatrice Garth rose to get the newspapers, and read eagerly what they had to print regarding the play. She heard her husband breathing stertorously in the adjoining room.

All that she read filled her with intense disappointment and anger, for the williest, most ingenious of press agents could not have exhumed from the notices a catch line with sufficient box-office punch in it to quote in the advertisements. The play was unanimously condemned by the critics, while her own histrionic efforts were treated in a light, flippant, contemptuous manner that was like wormwood to her.

"As cold as a refrigerator," one said.

"There was nothing to the play," remarked another, "and she got nothing out of it."

The more she read, the more furious she grew, and it was in no seraphic frame of mind that, later in the morning, she taxied to the Frivolity Theater to hear what Lake had to say.

She found the manager in his luxurious office, with the newspapers scattered on the floor about him. He had read them, too, and from the dark scowl on his unshaven face it was evident that he had derived very little comfort from them.

He greeted Beatrice Garth with cold restraint. It was painfully apparent that his attitude to her had changed overnight.

"Well!" he said, paying little attention to her greeting. "The play's a flop. In all my experience as a producer I ain't never had such a flop. I was afraid before I done it that it was too good. You can't feed highbrow stuff to lowbrows without givin' 'em mental indigestion. You got to jazz things up to make 'em soak into ivory domes."

"Yes, the piece particularly appeals to the intelligentsia," said Beatrice.

The word was one that she had recently added to her vocabulary, and it pleased her to use it often.

"That's just the trouble," complained Lake bitterly. "It means that all you can sell is a few nigger heaven seats. I never knew the intelligentsia to have more than fifty cents!"

"I was terribly disappointed in my death scene," she went on. "I thought my fall from the staircase would knock 'em out of their seats."

"There was just a few left to see it," explained Lake. "The critics had gone, an' so had nearly all the audience. Skribble never should 'a' killed off *Violet Montessor* in the last act. She could 'a' expiated all her sins, an' the doctor could 'a' made a mistake when he said she had an organic disease. People won't stand for an unhappy endin'."

Business on the next few nights was very poor, and back on the stage the atmosphere was charged with most alarming rumors. Beatrice Garth, filled with apprehension, went to have another talk with Lake.

This time it was not easy to see him. Before the juvenile Cerberus who guarded the magnate's door condescended to take in her name, he let her cool her heels for some time outside the railing. His manner, like his master's, had changed to one of chilling hauteur.

Finally, however, she was admitted to Lake's presence.

"Is it true, Mr. Lake," she began, "that the play's going to close on Saturday night?"

"Why, yes, we're goin' to close," he said. "It's a wise little guy who knows when he's licked."

"You've given me a rotten deal," she charged him furiously, "in getting me to leave a company where I was drawing a good salary!"

"Now, come, Miss Garth," he said, unruffled by her outburst of temper. "Let's be fair. Yes, we got to be fair. I didn't sandbag or blackjack you into leavin' your company, did I? I gave you a contract at five hundred a week for the run of the play, with an option on your future services at eight hundred a week. I'm goin' to fill it honorably, too. The run ends Saturday night, an' I don't choose to exercise my option."

"Then your theater's going to be dark!" she said spitefully.

"Only for a week," he replied, with a good deal of satisfaction. "I've got an attraction comin' in that's burnin' up things on the road. I had to give pretty stiff terms to get it, because three other New York managers was after it. Well, I've grabbed it off at sixty-five and thirty-five, me to share accordin' to percentage on all extras. I tried to get four thousand a week guarantee, but there was nothin' doin'."

"Who has the show?" Beatrice asked curiously.

"Why, some young man out in Ohio," Lake prattled on. "He's got a big steel mill in a town there with a queer-soundin' name, an' he's a millionaire three or four times over. He's a rank sucker at the theatrical game, so maybe that's why he's got the biggest hit in years. The play's a perfect sensation, an' is doin' capacity everywhere. One of the reasons is his leadin' lady. They all tell me she's the most promisin' young actress on the American stage to-day."

Beatrice Garth felt a sudden sinking of her heart.

"What's the name of the piece?" she asked.

"The name of the piece?" repeated Lake. "Ain't it strange how sometimes things turn out even funnier in real life than in plays? The name of the piece is 'Hearts Triumphant.'"

The Jungle Girl

THE STORY OF A PACIFIC PARADISE WHICH CONTAINED
MORE SERPENTS THAN ONE

By Eleanor Gates

Author of "The Poor Little Rich Girl," "The Butterfly of Leepoohu," etc.

BAINBRIDGE, owner of a rich plantation on the remote island of Siru, is driven out by two unscrupulous rivals, Jennsen and Ogilvie, and his partner, MacFee, is drowned under suspicious circumstances. A year later, he returns on the schooner *Laura*, determined to assert his rights with the help of eight companions, who are to share in the expected profits. He is also anxious to discover what has become of Sonsie MacFee, his friend's young daughter.

Captain Norton, skipper of the *Laura*, goes ashore in a boat, intending to ask the native chief, Lautaga, to allow his crew a few days' hunting, on the pretext that the schooner needs fresh meat. The natives, by Jennsen's orders, keep away from the *Laura*'s men; but they disregard this unfriendly reception, and look for a camping place. Philip Norton, the captain's son, who is one of the landing party, gets a glimpse of a golden-haired white girl, who can be none other than Sonsie MacFee; but she flees into the woods before he can speak to her. It appears that for a year she has been hiding in the woods, in terror of Jennsen.

That evening, the landing party having returned to the *Laura*, the sound of paddling is heard in the darkness under the schooner's stern. Captain Norton, prepares to receive the unknown visitors with due precautions against a surprise attack.

VII

UNDER the stern of the schooner, a sound of soft paddling had ceased. Out of the blackness, beyond the small circle of light cast by the single lantern, now came a low-spoken greeting:

"You fella! Hallo!"

Taking care to keep himself well screened, Captain Norton reached for the stern light and dropped it overside. What he saw below him looked like a huge ridge of jet on that livid sea.

"Hello!" he answered cautiously. "What fella you?"

That ridge moved, as if it were some lazy, dark-skinned sea monster. From it again came the voice, now scarcely more than a whisper:

"Where cap'n fella? We two fella ride about. We like talk that fella."

A moment, and a small flash light replaced the automatic in the skipper's right hand.

"All right," he returned, and, pointing the flash in the direction of the voice, pressed the button.

Those who were staring down into the

blackness now saw, huddled close in against the schooner, a single outrigger canoe. Seated in it, their dark faces upraised, were two natives. One was a large and fairly young man, in whose hands was the paddle. The other was old. In a wrapping of dark cloth, out of which was thrust a wizened and bewhiskered face, he resembled a timid baboon.

"Let down a ladder," directed Captain Norton.

Having thrust the lantern into the hand of a man next him, he made several quick changes of position, flashing the electric spot here and there, to see if other boats were near the *Laura*. Meanwhile feet pattered and men could be heard breathing hard in the dark, as several of the crew carried out the captain's orders.

The ladder in place, those on the quarter-deck waited in a tense silence. Presently, puffing and grunting, the old native came into sight. He had doffed his calico wrapping for the climb, and, save for a loin cloth, was naked. Upon his thin and wrinkled body could be seen the long, horizontal scars of old cicatrices.

But though he had relieved himself of

the cotton robe which might have encumbered him in his climb, he had, on the other hand, added something by way of adornment. On his head, instead of the customary square of bright cloth, he wore what appeared to be a gayly patterned fez of paper, held securely in place by the usual string-wound twist of vine. It made him considerably taller, and did not seem incongruous, though it was nothing but a brightly colored lamp shade.

Below the shade was a long, narrow face in which danced a pair of little rimless, glittering eyes. Their brows were so white—and so white, also, was the hair showing above each distended ear, as well as the thin mustache and the scanty beard—that all this hirsute trimming on a swart skin gave an effect of artificiality, as if he had made himself a wig and brows, a mustache and a beard, and had pasted them in place. Through the septum of a wide, flat nose was thrust a bit of reed.

Scarcely had the wide-splayed feet of the old man touched the deck when, with a bound, his companion alighted on the planks at his side, and darted a quick scrutiny at the circle greeting the two. This native, who was about thirty years of age, was an extraordinary-looking individual.

In sharp contrast to the other, he was of the Polynesian type. He was tall and sturdily formed, with a virile carriage. His color was a smooth, dark olive. He had a finely modeled head, a hooked, high-bridged nose, and a firm mouth, which was neither too heavy nor too full. Above his brilliant and expressive eyes his eyebrows formed a straight penthouse. His face was balanced by a well developed chin.

His forehead receded only slightly, but its slope was emphasized by the fact that his short-cut, wavy hair began well back on his head, which he carried with a certain bravado. To either side of the forehead, instead of a parting, there was a deep indentation where no hair grew. In the peak between, and pointing forward, he wore two feathers of the yellow cockatoo.

His dress was a trifle more elaborate than that of the old man, for, in addition to his low-worn cloth girdle, he was plentifully ornamented. The great earrings that hung from his slit ears were of tortoise shell, about his upper arms were wide bands of copper wire, and on his full chest, hanging by intricately braided sennit, was a large, flat, circular slab of stone. As he

moved, the lantern light shone on the rude decoration, causing the mica in it to sparkle.

With a smile that was meant to reassure them, Captain Norton led the two islanders down the companionway from the quarter-deck and into the main cabin. In the room, every porthole of which was closely curtained, Bainbridge was standing. As he caught sight of the visitors, he uttered a low bellow of joy:

"Lautaga!"

Blinking in the light, the old chief gaped in astonishment at the big man, knowing the voice, but not yet recognizing the shaven countenance. Then, slowly, Lautaga began to show a few long, tobacco-stained teeth.

"Bainbrikk!" he answered.

"Lautaga! The very man I wanted to see!" Bainbridge had taken hold of a skinny arm, and was pumping it so hard that the joints all but creaked. "By golly, chief, me glad for look along o' you!"

There was no doubting the happiness of the ruler of Siru. Tears were coursing down his dark cheeks, and his features were puckered with emotion. In his dialect he cackled an excited greeting.

"Lautaga?" repeated Captain Norton, almost as if he doubted their good luck.

Bainbridge now had the hand of the chief's attendant.

"Yes, and Yerrah," he replied. "Are they glad I'm back? Well, just look at 'em! Yerrah's the chief's nephew. Thunderation, let's get 'em seated, so we can hear the news!"

By now young Norton was standing beside the short-skirted figure of his mother, and Pollard was with them, leaning on his cane. Lautaga would not sit until he had given these three and the captain a rapt examination, and had not only admired, but fingered, the dining table, the swivel chairs, and even the carpet on the deck.

Then, the door being closed in preparation for the conference, Lautaga curled his withered shanks under him. Yerrah remained standing, straight, firmly poised, like some respectful servitor. In front of the chief squatted Bainbridge, still trembling with excitement. The others waited, curious, but entertained to the full, while, almost nose to nose, the two on the carpet propounded questions to each other in the native jargon, and answered them.

The planter—knowing already that Mac-

Fee's daughter was alive and well, and not mentioning her, lest the chief should guess how anxious he was, and should use that concern to his own benefit—inquired about Jenns.

"What of the misshapen one?" he asked.

"May Kias cut him off!" prayed the old man fervently. "Ah, Bainbrikki, all things come right for Yennso. If he chanced to fall into the sea, as did Makhafee, when again he rose, in either hand he would be holding a fish!"

"And Okeefee?"

Lautaga shrugged.

"That snake-looking one!" he exclaimed.

"He is, as ever, the shadow of Yennso; and the shadow of the crooked man, that also is crooked."

"But thou art seeming friends with them?"

"Ai!" answered the chief philosophical. "When the wicked monkey is in power, those who are wise bow to him."

"The two do not help Lautaga?" pressed Bainbridge sympathetically.

"Can a man lean upon a serpent?" asked the chief. Then, bitterly: "Yennso would hew down the same tree which gives him shade!"

With one ear, as it were, constantly strained for any sound coming from outside—where, in the blackness, the men again watched the sea in every direction—Captain Norton now interposed a question:

"Bainbridge, here's one thing I don't understand—if the chief didn't know you were aboard, how does it happen that he came?"

Holding those glittering eyes, the planter bluntly put the query; but he framed it adroitly.

"Did Yennso pay you well for coming so far in the night?"

Lautaga nodded.

"A rich gift of cotton!" he replied with enthusiasm.

At that Bainbridge promptly heaved himself up, disappeared into his cabin for a moment, and came forth with a calico bolt, from which he was tearing the wrapping of heavy paper. Without a word, once more he dropped to sit upon his heels, the bolt on the carpet before him.

Mouths open, and eyes wide, the natives stared at the cloth admiringly. Presently the chief raised his look.

"When has Yennso equaled the Powerful in gifts?" he observed.

The planter understood the comparison. Now was his opportunity for showing the open hand. He took up the calico and laid it upon Lautaga's quickly outstretched hands.

"Speak on," he commanded.

A moment later he was translating for the others: "Yes, they were sent to snoop. They snooped once before, when another schooner showed up, and darned near got shot for their trouble. Jennsen and Ogilvie can't sleep nights, for fear I'll come back, alive or as a haunt. They're smart, though. They had these two come as if coming was against the orders on shore. That's why the canoe reached us from seaward. Lautaga has a story ready to tell Jennsen. He'll say that he saw nobody he knew. The schooner has several white women aboard. We're not traders, but just sailing around for fun. He'll face straight about, you understand—nothing like a gift of calico to fix that! Besides, he really seems almost tickled to death to see me. I tell you, a Kanaka don't cry often. This old boy is downright happy!"

He went on with his questioning of the chief.

"Since Bainbrikki went from Siru," he said, "perhaps matters have not proceeded to thy best liking?"

"When the cat withdraws," Lautaga answered, "then do the mice frisk."

The planter laughed heartily.

"In my country we also have that saying. What evil is it that Yennso commits?"

The old man growled in his throat.

"One word relates it," was the reply; "and that word is of the fermented."

"Ha-a-a-ah!" It was the big man's turn to growl. "So *that's* the best they can do with the coconut groves, eh—make toddy?"

After that, for ten minutes, Lautaga chattered without interruption in his choppy dialect. When he finished, like a man who is satisfied, Bainbridge got up.

"In the first place," he told the captain, "Jennsen has led 'em all to believe that I'm dead, and maybe he honestly thinks so. Anyhow, to go ashore and arrest Jennsen and Ogilvie would be fatal, in spite of the fact that the chief's more'n anxious to dislodge 'em."

"Good!" cried the skipper. "What are our ruler's grievances?"

"Here on Siru," Bainbridge answered,

"it's about the same as in our civilized country—the people are divided on the questions of booze and political power. The chief had an only son. He died a while back—since I left—of blood poisoning. Next in line is Lautaga's grandson, a young limb named Kooyah."

Lautaga, recognizing the name, held up a bony finger.

"He hath a double row of teeth," he informed the planter; "also hair that is the color of the fire tree; and now he is growing his milk beard."

"The chief says the red-headed youngster is getting sassy," Bainbridge continued.

"Jennsen and Ogilvie make up strong to him and his bunch of young bucks. They form, I take it, what we'd call Young Siru. That's the crowd that was strung along this whole side of the island, though the chief ain't said so yet. For the present, I'm keeping off that subject. The conservatives make up the crowd that handed you all the silence this morning when you stepped out of the launch. Well, we don't want to make enemies of either branch of the island's politicians."

Again Lautaga interrupted:

"Okeefee catch 'em blenty riple."

"Hear that?" Bainbridge cried. "Plenty of rifles! No wonder they acted so cocky!"

"Then Jennsen and Ogilvie are actually masters of Siru?" the captain asked.

The chief had not understood the question, his knowledge of English being scant. The planter translated. Then the old man's shining eyes began to dart from one white face to the other, and the light they gave off was red.

"I am yet lord of Siru," he told Bainbridge, his pride plainly outraged. "From old times has this island been the foothold of my father's fathers. All white men are but wayfarers in my house."

"The way I understand the situation is this," the big man told his companions. "The chief is afraid of treachery. He won't live long, but he ain't eager to be put out of the way. He knows I'd never let that happen, and he's thanking the god of the mountain that I'm here, because he sees a way of getting rid of whites who are plain enemies to him, being as they can manage the young heir a good deal better than they can Lautaga. I'm pretty certain that he thinks Kooyah is being backed for the chieftainship."

"What about the hunt?" asked young Norton—with, however, the daughter of MacFee rather than the shooting in mind.

"We're to land as if we don't ask odds of anybody," Bainbridge replied. "Jennsen and Ogilvie won't like it, but what can they do, especially as we're to give every hut some calico and tobacco for every day we go into the jungle? If the natives get their blackmail, they won't care how much our two white friends beef. Of course, not a soul is to know that I'm back—not yet a while. Just put up your camp, and bribe to a fare-you-well, and let matters shape themselves."

"And will you soon be able to ask about a certain person?" ventured Mrs. Norton.

Bainbridge nodded, and put the question instantly. Hearing it, the erect, brown figure behind the chief swayed its weight from foot to foot, and Yerrah's expressive eyes glowed with anger; but Lautaga hung his head.

"Bainbrikki," began the old chief falteringly, "the daughter of Makhafee is dead."

Though the planter had in his breast pocket what could reassure him, he was for a moment startled by the news, fearing that something might have happened to Sonsie MacFee since the return of the launch.

"When?" he demanded.

Chin on breast, Lautaga replied. He saw the Beautiful for the last time when that other schooner weighed anchor before the village. Then the old white head bent so far forward that the lamp shade threatened to fall.

Instantly Bainbridge was on his guard, suspecting that the chief might be lying; also that he might be trying to find out from the planter whether or not the girl had been seen. He imitated Lautaga's attitude of grief, murmuring sorrowfully:

"How came the little one to die?"

The other did not know. He began to chatter so fast that even Bainbridge could not understand him, and begged him to be more calm.

When the planter had heard the whole of the old man's story, a profound change was wrought in him. Breathing hard and staring almost wildly, he broke out into violent exclamations:

"The beast! The bald old beast! The black-hearted rascal, to dare to think of such a thing! That's why he wanted me out of the way! Well, I'm glad I know

this to-night! I'll bounce that pair off Siru, if it's the last thing I do on earth! God help me to do it! Why, it's a wonder Andy ain't crawled up out of the sea!"

The old chief got up on his splay-toed feet again and shuffled his way out, in the wake of Miller, to the quarter-deck, where a snack of something tasty had been spread for him and his companion, along with a generous gift of tobacco. Bainbridge, frothing and red-faced, gave those who remained in the cabin an explanation for his own rage.

"That poor little kid!" he raved. "Orphaned, mind you, and not another white woman on the island to stand between her and that fiend! Why, Jennsen ain't got one ounce of decency! He wanted Sonsie to marry him—him, a man almost old enough to be her grandfather! Well, the dear youngster took to the jungle—last night and hasn't been seen since. *That* explains! Say, for two cents I'd go ashore this minute and shoot him down!"

The big man choked.

"The poor, precious little thing!" Mrs. Norton joined in. "Think of her doing that when, as you say, she's never had a single white woman—an older woman—to teach and advise her! It's wonderful! It shows the instinctive goodness of the child."

Bainbridge softened, losing some of the purple of his wrath.

"Lautaga said of her, 'White as scraped arrowroot!' Kind of pretty, don't you think? And he spoke of her as a blossom, too. He thinks the jungle devils got her. She came to Lautaga about her troubles, and cried. Ah, no wonder that in my sleep I see her crying, and in the jungle, so that I'm chasing the trails to find her! Lautaga says he advised her to marry Jennsen, just to keep things peaceful on Siru. He pointed out that Jennsen is old, and will soon die, when Sonsie could marry a younger man. There's the native for you! Compromise is their middle name! That was the last time he set eyes on her, but he admits she took her traps along, and that ties up, Phil, with what you saw. Say, if we didn't know the glorious *truth*!"

He spread his hands eloquently.

"But we do," Mrs. Norton reminded him; "and we know her worth—her high standards. Even if we didn't have a right to help you get back what's yours, Mr. Bainbridge, we would still have the duty of rescuing that child."

"A year in the jungle!" the planter went on. "If you knew what that means—rain, and mosquitoes, and ants everywhere, not to mention what being alone must mean to that little, young thing! Why, you couldn't induce a native girl to stay out like that! And I'm afraid Mitu-Mitu has told poor Sonsie all the truck about devil-devils, and Kias gods, and the balance of the twaddle."

The captain laughed.

"Well, Bainbridge, she's more afraid of your man, Jennsen, than she is of devils, evidently. Did you tell Lautaga she's alive?"

"Not if I ain't crazy, I didn't! Norton, we mustn't do that! You can't tell what a tip of toddy or a bolt of cotton might do to the old man. No, *sir*! Oh, if only she could know that old Bainbrikki is here! Oh, my stars!"

He was but little calmer when he announced that he was going ashore, where he would make his way into the jungle with a flash light and call her softly as he went. He was for having young Norton along, for they were, first of all, to visit that retreat close to the open space.

"But you two will give her dead away, if you don't look out," the captain declared. "If they watched the shore to-day, they'll watch it twice as close to-night, expecting her to make a break for the first schooner she can get away to. Also you've got to remember that she isn't the only person on the island who'll be listening."

The planter had to confess that his proposal was far from wise.

"Wonder where she's been staying!" he exclaimed. "I don't recall a single hut anywhere away from the beach."

"She'd keep away from a hut," argued the captain. "That's the first place Jennsen would look—also the second, and the one thousandth. No, that tattered little stowaway is hiding where nobody can find her. She'll be here to-day, and somewhere else to-morrow."

"I'll bet our pig shooting is gone by the board," complained young Norton. "They'll never consent to our hunting through the jungle, even if you bribe the chief."

"That sounds probable," the planter admitted glumly. "Well, we can land the launch on the far side of Siru, and come in this way. If you don't favor the idea of calling to her, why, we can do this—write

a lot of notices, saying that old Bainbrikki is back, and where to meet us."

"I'll go around and stick 'em on trees," suggested young Norton, laughing; "like a sort of a South Sea *Orlando*, looking for a South Sea *Atala*."

"I don't know who your friends are that you mention," said the big man, with a rueful grin; "but I know that Jennsen and Ogilvie can read a lot better'n she can—which would put a crimp in *that* plan."

"The simplest way to do the trick," declared Captain Norton, "is to camp where Sonsie can come stealing to our tents. When she sees that we're white folks—"

"When she sees me!" interposed Mrs. Norton. "Oh, you're right, dear! We must land on the beach this very night!"

VIII

AT sunrise next morning, when, stretching and yawning, Ogilvie stepped out upon his veranda and looked beachward through the lines of brown-shafted coconuts, which were set with the regularity of telegraph poles, he noted—cursing as he looked—that the *Laura* was still at anchor.

Then something nearer at hand than the schooner set him to leaning and peering. What caught his eye, and puzzled him, was among the trees close to the water. Had the brown women been hanging up calico? For something was blowing there, grayish white, yet contrasting with the sand.

Then he knew what he was seeing, and he fell to cursing with renewed vigor.

"Tents!" he exclaimed, appalled. "A camp on shore! Without asking permission! Without a word!"

His stream of epithets choked him.

As on the previous morning, he hurried off to Jennsen's. Getting no reply to his halloo from the ground, he hauled himself up by a rickety railing and scratched on the woven door.

"Jennsen!" he bawled. "Listen! The schooner crowd is camped on our beach!"

Again there was no answer. He pushed the door wide and stood on the sill, to look around. Here MacFee had made a home for his motherless little daughter, partitioning the place down the center, but leaving it unceiled.

When Ogilvie's eyes had become accustomed to the gloom of the double room, he saw that, though the hour was so early, the big bed which once had been the Scotsman's

was empty, and evidently had not been occupied during the past night. A little startled, he faced about.

"Queer!" he ejaculated aloud. "Where's he been?"

Struck with the thought that possibly Jennsen might have been taken captive by the schooner's people, he set himself in motion again, lumbered down the ladder, and hastened past his own hut to the house of Lautaga. This stood on an abrupt rise, ten or twelve feet high, made by placing great slabs of rock in successive layers. The work was of ancient date, and a rank verdure helped to hide the fact that the hand of man had devised the terrace.

Stone steps led up to the veranda, which was floored with split bamboo laid upon a framing of large bamboo poles. The skeleton of the structure was of the same giant cylinders, lashed with sennit. The steep roof of thatch came far down.

This being a native habitation, Ogilvie entered the low, narrow, doorless opening without waiting either to call out or to scratch the outer weave of the wall. Toward the rear of the long room within, between parallel poles that rested on the floor and reached from one end of the big hut to the other, a score of people lay sleeping.

Ogilvie waddled to where the old chief was curled, seized a corner of his covering, and dragged at it.

"Up from thy mat, Lautaga!" he ordered peremptorily.

Up jerked the white head from the pole which, smoothed by a century of use, served the dwellers of the hut as a pillow. As the chief raised himself, halfway down the line of quiet bodies another head lifted itself—a round, red head.

"Kias give peace!" scolded Lautaga, his crinkled eyes narrowing resentfully as he saw who stood there, hands on hips, gazing down. "What lost hound is howling?"

The white man did not feel himself rebuked by the chief's question.

"It is Okeefee. Rise!"

But the ruler of Siru only laid his head against the long pillow pole again.

"So the sun lives once more by thy shallow permission," he observed ironically, "and getting up comes by thy most worthy command!"

"Give ear to me!" continued Ogilvie, growing wrathful, and speaking so loud that several of the sleepers were suddenly added to his audience.

"Truly I give ear," added the chief complainingly; "though my head aches extremely of thy foaming. Am I to find coconuts to-day through the pointing of a blind man?"

It was a saying that the hut could enjoy, and there was a burst of laughter, which Ogilvie ignored.

"Yennso is missing from his high bed," he declared, "and the strangers from the fire ship have stood cloth huts within the grove."

A clattering of tongues greeted this exciting news, Lautaga's shrill treble joining in, while he got to his feet with unexpected agility.

"How?" he demanded. "Cloth huts in the grove? *Ai!* White men are ever like the wind, entering at each crevice!"

He wound at his length of calico, making it snug about his body.

"I named these strangers thieves," Ogilvie reminded him. "Was I a blind man then? Now they creep in upon us while yet the island is shaded by night."

The chief addressed his family:

"Nothing could be more bold! Give me the ornaments for my arms! Give me the beautiful topping for my head, and my spear!"

The half shut eyes of the white man showed satisfaction.

"Yennso and Okeefee will not let Siru be robbed!" he boasted.

Lautaga was pushing wide bracelets of wire up his thin old arms.

"I have lived many seasons," he said; "therefore have I seen many disasters; but Okeefee has ever been a friend. He has done great doings for Siru; and of all such kindnesses, greatest is this coming to give warning."

Ogilvie's satisfaction increased, not only because he was being commended, but also because he had succeeded in causing something of an uproar.

"If the cloth buildings do not go at once," he announced, "there will be more to do than warn."

"*A-a-a-i!*" agreed the old man, fixing those glittering eyes on the speaker. "Strongly said! These intruders should have thought of their going away before they came."

This was another saying. It covertly implied violence.

Once more the bright-patterned lamp shade was set on Lautaga's head, along his

pipe-stem arms were thrust more ornate bandings, and a warrior's amulet was hung about his scrawny neck. With an upward toss of his spear, he summoned Yerrah to him; but it was he of the flaming hair who came shoving forward in the lead.

Kooyah's was not a pleasant countenance. He had handsome brows of glossy black, but the somber eyes under them moved independently, as it were, so that as often as not one turned in upon the other. His double row of teeth, lacking room between his jaws, constantly forced his lips to stay open, lending his face an expression at once cruel and fierce.

Before he could voice an opinion, however, his grandfather paid him a disarming compliment.

"Kooyah, my princeling," he greeted, "in my absence, since prowlers may chance upon the house of the chief, no other but thee shall stay to guard and stand in my stead at its door."

Whereupon he thrust his spear into the hands of the young man.

"The chief goes without Yennso?" asked Ogilvie, in surprise, as the old man hobbled out.

"Yennso is in the forest," Lautaga answered carelessly, as if he had but just recalled it. "Yes—he is gone to search for the daughter of Makhafee. No matter—all will be well; therefore pick up thy chin, Okeefee, for it hangs even upon the bone of thy breast."

Hobbling out, with Yerrah at his calloused heels, he paused only long enough to shade his forehead with a hand that was like a withered leaf.

But on the terrace Ogilvie halted. He had no mind to take another snubbing from Captain Norton, especially in the presence of the sharp-tongued old chief.

"Thou shalt do the squawking, old hawk," he told Lautaga sulkily.

The latter was picking his way down the steps to the path that wound to the beach, keeping up a steady cackle of comments, and taking a nervous glance now and then in the direction of the MacFee house, as one who fears pursuit.

However, during his walk, it was anger which appeared to be mounting in him. When he reached the group of shelters, and found himself face to face with the skipper, those who watched him marveled at the violence with which he dared to speak. They admired his feverish gesticulating and

the wild way in which he shook a spear that he had taken from Yerrah.

"He certainly can act fierce!" remarked the skipper. "This is going off in first-class shape. I believe he'll fool the lot of 'em. Give him his tobacco and calico, Philip, or he'll stamp a hole in our front yard!"

As the chief continued to expostulate heatedly, now and then whirling about upon Yerrah for emphatic confirmation of his words, what the schooner's men did appeared to be by way of a complete capitulation to Lautaga's demands. Hurrying to and fro between the old native and the tents, they fetched enough gifts to make a pile higher than his bent knees.

Yerrah took up the pile, winding his arms about it, and started back toward the long house, with Lautaga tiptoeing and clacking in his wake. About Ogilvie, who was still planted on the terrace, murmurs of admiration concerning the spirit and bravery of the chief now changed to excited cries of expectancy—which caused the white man to curse in two tongues.

Drawing close to home, Lautaga heard Ogilvie's stream of protests.

"I yielded a slow yes to them," he called out; "and they are to chase pig and deer only for three days."

"Bah!" replied Ogilvie, in furious disgust. "You open your own door to robbers! You place their hands upon your own head! Descendant of fools!"

At the white man's audacity, some of his hearers drew their breath sharply, or exchanged amazed looks. No one spoke.

The chief kept his composure.

"Even the foolish must sometimes be right," he replied with dignity. "These strangers wish to hunt, and to buy yams, hens, and green bananas—also coconuts and ripe fruits that will guard against the scurvy. In return for each day's hunting, this much comes from their hands." He pointed to the heap that Yerrah had deposited on the bamboo porch. "Since I am not strong enough to bite those hands, is it not wiser, for the sake of my people, to kiss them?"

Ogilvie answered in English, thumping his own chest:

"Why didn't you ask *me* before you struck a bargain?"

Lautaga understood the gesture, if not the words. His look was both innocent and crafty.

"Did Okeefee, laboring in the earth like a woman, plant the groves which bend round Siru?" he inquired.

"No! Under the counseling of Bainbrikki, driver of slaves, the men of Siru did woman's work in the sun."

The chief waved a hand in a wide half circle.

"Yes, truly," he went on dreamily. "I remember how it was Okeefee who did all this difficult planting, wherefore only Okeefee should bargain for the yield. *A-a-ai*, but it is the devil-devils who have made to grow the smaller trees that reach up to weight and choke the ones that bear."

Ogilvie broke in, not caring to be sneered at longer.

"The men from the ship may not hunt upon Siru unless Yennso agrees," he asserted. "Even conversation was forbidden. Can your memory not reach back to yesterday? And here—here!"

He indicated the heap of gifts.

Lautaga grinned around upon the growing crowd before his door.

"Yennso must agree?" he repeated. "All this was brought out of the cloth huts of the strangers—not from the house of Yennso. When does Lautaga climb Kias looking for fish?"

The shot told. Ogilvie flung up his arms.

"You blamed idiots!" he raged. "You'd sell the whole island for a mouth organ and a cake of scented soap!"

Now the old chief pretended to be at his wit's end.

"*Ai*, the people of Siru!" he mourned. "All are as a nut between two rocks!"

But the next minute, licking his lips, he was sidling around the donation, picking at it inquiringly. He plucked the cover from a pasteboard box. The box was full of colored string, yellow and red and blue. At sight of the bright-hued balls a great shout went up.

"All this for pigs!" triumphed the old man. He picked up bolts of calico, tobacco in tin foil, small mirrors, needles, knives. "What are pigs and deer to us, when the people may have this much each dawn?"

A burst of wild enthusiasm made Ogilvie see that it was not wise to side against a bargain that was so popular.

"This is different," he conceded instantly. "As Lautaga says, for a pig or a deer all this is good exchange."

"I could not find strength in me to say no," explained the old chief, grinning com-

placently. "I could not cheat my people of all these coveted articles!"

Ogilvie made off rapidly. He had caught sight of a heavy, slouching figure which, clothed in blue jeans, was shuffling forward through the palms. Headed toward Jennsen, and advancing briskly, were five men from the tents, each carrying a rifle. Ogilvie hastened to join his partner before the shooting party came up.

"The schooner gang's on shore, bag and baggage," was all he had time to say. He added, whispering: "You ought to see the truck they piled out to Lautaga!"

Jennsen, hurrying back from the direction of Kias, had stopped short, with his long arms at his side. He blew out his breath in an explosion of astonishment and disgust, as Captain Norton and the latter's men halted.

The skipper smiled cheerfully into Jennsen's bloodshot eyes, which were instantly averted.

"Just fixed it up with the chief for a couple of days of jungle sport," he explained blandly. "We've had thousands of miles of sea without enough fresh meat to feed the ship's cat, and as we're bound for Australia, it's necessary for us to get some here."

Jennsen glanced from one to another of the hunters, finding self-control difficult.

"You won't scare up much game," he said at last. "We don't see a pig in a blue moon, and the deer are the original needles in the haystack."

The skipper laughed.

"That's hard luck; but we'll hope for the best, because the men are about famished for a fresh roast. However, if we don't make a kill, we'll have to be satisfied with chickens."

Jerking a nod of farewell, he led his little party on. Ogilvie, having kept in the background during the short dialogue, now began to curse once more.

"I call that cheek!" he vowed. "Not a word to us, but—"

The other man interrupted sharply.

"Drop it! Don't quarrel with Lautaga—with the schooner crowd, either. It's too late to lock any stable now; the horse is gone. Lautaga has permitted them to hunt right in the face of everything I said to him yesterday. He's bold because they're on the ground. Well, maybe they won't always be on the ground!"

Jennsen's nod was significant.

"They've been taking green bananas aboard already," he went on. "Boated half a ton out before you were on your pins. That's high-handed for you! Well, I put the best face I could on the whole thing. If I go against the chief, who's going to help us put these guys off? *You?*" he snorted.

Ogilvie turned a dull red.

"We're up against it, that's all," Jennsen continued. "While I was up in the jungle, this crowd has landed, and has started bribing. It puts me in this position—I don't give the natives the fancy stuff they want, and I don't want anybody else to give it to 'em. Now I've got to be careful, or I'll have every Kanaka on Siru down on us!"

"Guess it don't matter much, anyhow," returned Ogilvie, in the tone of one who wishes to mollify. "If that girl was alive, she'd be showing herself before now. It's like I've been saying all along—she's done for."

Jennsen showed his fang in a sneer.

"Yes?" he said.

"I'd stake my share of what we've got put under the—"

"Shut up, you fool!"

"Nobody can hear us," said Ogilvie.

"Nobody can hear us, you old woman," scoffed Jennsen; "but I can tell you something that'll change your tune. Sonsie's alive, and she's been within fifteen yards of the beach."

"No-o-o!"

"You ain't so cocksure now, are you—not when I can show you where she slept last night? It wasn't anybody else but Sonsie. I found fresh banana skins, and orange peel, and Mitu-Mitu's comb!"

IX

WITH her belongings wrapped up tightly in her mat and swung between her slender shoulders, the young fugitive was by now many times fifteen yards from the beach, and was making farther away from it as fast as those little bare feet could carry her.

The previous afternoon, when she realized that she had been seen, Sonsie was not so much terrified as she was out of temper with herself. Fortunately it was a stranger from the schooner who had discovered her—as was proved by his answering of that far-off hail; but she thought it likely that, on his return to the launch, he

might mention to the natives, or to Jennsen and Ogilvie, that he had seen a white girl in the jungle.

Even the thought made her shudder.

"Then they know I am near by," she mourned. "They will watch the schooner so close that I am not able to swim out there unless they see me. If I don't swim out, the big boat, she will go away and leave me. *Aui!* Well, anyhow, I don't ever go back to my house—no! Out by the ship, if them peoples say they don't take me, I go down in the water to you, daddy. Yes, I make finish of myself!"

But here a new thought intruded itself.

"I guess that's wicked thinking, because the natives, they don't kill themselves. They 'fraid. They say how Kias don't like it, and, daddy, your God, maybe He don't like it neither!"

She waited a few minutes, with the back of one hand laid against her lips, as if to keep them still, while she listened intently. Then, anxious to move her property and herself before the spying stranger could get back with his companions and hunt for her—or, what would be worse, continue on into the coconut grove and tell his news, which would set a whole pack on her trail—she forced herself to steal forward to where she could peer out and see her possessions.

Here she found hanging the square with which she bound her hair. First of all she replaced it, snug and secure. Then, gathering up everything into a bundle, quickly she hunted a deeper covert, taking care not to leave behind her any telltale traces of her passage.

In the hidden spot she drew some ferns over the bundle, crouched with her back resting against a tree upholstered in velvety moss, drew her knees to her chin, covered her feet, and laid across her face a second piece of faded cloth, so that only her eyes remained unscreened.

Thus she waited, not moving.

"If somebody comes, and I know he can find me," she decided, "I can holler hard, and that will bring the men from the ship."

A few minutes later she heard the men from the ship go past along the trail. She recognized them by the tramping of their shod feet. None spoke as he went by. Nevertheless, her heart pounded nervously.

A little later, when she heard the *put, put, put*, of the Laura's launch as it carried the visitors back to the schooner, she felt

utterly forsaken, and under her face cloth the tears made wet paths down her cheeks.

"Maybe the schooner, she goes away now," she whispered. "Oh, when I think like that, I feel awful sick! I hurt inside me, like I got a thorn to cut me!"

Anxious hours of keeping still followed. She could not see the schooner. Every half hour, between the reassuring ringing of the Laura's bell, seemed like half a day.

As she waited, she did not so much as curl and uncurl a toe. Above her the big leaves were so many green punkahs, fanning lazily. Their soft brushing mingled with the soothing hum of an army of insects, and the gentle lapping of the sea. With her chin on her knees, Sonsie slept.

When she awoke, morning was closer at hand than she thought. About her the darkness was so thick that she was able to see her own hands; but when she drew off the face cloth and looked up, she saw no clouds, only a few stars, low and large.

In that utter blackness, against the ground, she felt safe. She rose, finding herself stiff from being so long in one position, and bent herself against the cool, soft growth, limbering her muscles. Then, locating the bundle, she ate and drank.

While she stood, rested and refreshed, turning over in her mind the idea of creeping out to the edge of the jungle and taking a look at the schooner, she heard, coming from somewhere between herself and the Laura, an unmistakable sound.

"Boats!"

Without a thought that she was leaving behind her the evidence of her whereabouts during the night, she gathered her property together as well as she could, and tiptoed toward the trail, seeing with her hands, since her eyes were useless. She did not find the path. Not to be halted, she faced toward the village and, almost inch by inch, penetrated the comparatively narrow tongue of jungle which rose like a hedge between her and the grove.

Presently, herself a shadowy figure, she found the wild growth give place to the open, and saw other figures as shadowy as her own. She witnessed the silent unloading of rowboats and the going up of tents—this last a procedure which overwhelmed her with happiness.

"Oh, they stay for a long time!" she told herself, and could have wept again in her joy.

When the sky slowly brightened, she moved back, and farther back. This cut off her view of the tents; and for some time her ears told her nothing, since the people from the schooner did not speak at all. After a time, however, she heard a man's voice giving a short command. Next, she heard a second voice. This one was different from the other—higher, more musical; and it thrilled her.

"White lady!" she gasped.

She heard it a second time, low and clear. Then her tears came freely.

"A white lady! A white lady!" she whispered to herself, over and over, marveling even as she sobbed. "A white lady comes to Siru! Oh, now all is good for me! All is good—good!"

For now she knew that, without fear, she could ask for her passage on the schooner.

"And how glad I am when I can see that lady!" she pondered. "I hope she will like me—a little. Oh, I be sick if she don't! *Aui*, if only I don't talk so much like native! Because if this is great white lady, she will not like my talk."

Next came a more encouraging thought:

"But soon I learn more better, and also to read out of books, which is more easy to do than other things which please big white lady and gent. Anyhow, I do my best for her. 'You see,' I say to her, 'my daddy, he goes down out of the boat before he have time to tell me how I am to do.'"

Another thought gripped and tempted her almost beyond her strength. Why not now—at once—drop the bundle and run forward to the tents, there to throw herself at the feet of the white lady, as she had seen Jennsen pull frightened natives down to his feet? She could cling to a white hand, and tell her whole story, and implore to be taken away.

Something held her back.

"S'pose I go out and say I like for to go 'way? Maybe Jennsen comes, and tells them I belong on Siru, and not to take me. If they do like he says!"

That thought finally checked her.

"If I get back into my house again," she told herself, "I never go loose again!"

"I wait," she decided at last. "Better time is coming for to go to these ship peoples. Maybe that lady goes to walk close to Kias, and then I talk to her. If she don't come this side, then I swim out to the schooner, and climb up, and hide." Her brown eyes glowed with excitement.

"Jennsen ain't around out there, so they don't say no to me."

Then sudden terror swept over her; for even as Jennsen's name passed her lips, here, coming from the village, she saw his blue-clad figure, his bare, bald head, his long, swinging arms. With a start as swift as a minnow's, she turned and slipped in among the tangled vines, forgetting the white lady, the camp, the schooner—everything. With her bundle pounding her back, she struck for the path, found it, and sped mountainward.

Close to the steep-banked stream she turned sharply at right angles to take a trail which was even more dim than the first. It led directly away from the sea, and parallel with the river.

Behind her, to her right hand, a sound of brushing and breaking told her that Jennsen was pushing his way into the jungle. The fact that he was not trying to keep his movements quiet told her that he was not counting upon cornering her. He was searching for proof that she had been in the neighborhood.

As she trudged on, she took a more leisurely pace. The trail—a runway for wild creatures who came down to a salt lick close to the ocean—bore slightly upward, winding through the jungle like some green, low-roofed tunnel, the walls of which were draped with inextricably woven vines that hung quiet in the motionless air. Along this track the heat was oppressive. Down Sonsie's face, in channels already made by sad and happy tears, the perspiration poured, to drop from her pink chin to the path.

Sometimes, to get on, she had to reach and bend branches out of her way; but she had the assurance that, so far as human enemies were concerned, the trail was safe. In front of her, at almost every step, evidence of its safety showed. No one had passed up the track ahead of her, because across it, at every height, stretched numberless spider webs, intact.

Presently she stopped to breathe, and now she felt what a wrench it was to leave the beach and the schooner's people. She was so far into the forest that she could no longer hear Jennsen. Glancing up out of the green cave in which she had halted, she caught only an occasional bird note, which fell to her from the orchid-dotted roof of the jungle. She recognized a challenge as the screeching of some frightened parrakeets.

A hidden cockatoo grumbled at her. She grumbled back:

"Yes, I must stay up in here with you, and the monkeys, and the pigs!"

She clenched her teeth and pushed on, her bundle raking the walls of vine. When the sun stood overhead, she turned from the path and made her way across a stretch of higher ground, which was more or less open. On it grew clumps of tall, coarse, wild hemp, like horses' tails. These were stirring gently in the breeze that was just starting after the noon heat.

This was territory she knew. She circled, and approached from the opposite side a clump of hemp that streamed in the wind before the face of a rock. It, and a low, outspreading shrub, hid an opening into which, with an impatient exclamation, she tossed her load.

She was at home!

Ten yards away, between high, vine-hung walls, the river washed its way around the base of the mountain. If any one were to approach her across that open space, she had only to make a short run and a leap. She had chosen her little cave in the rocks because it was so close to that deep avenue of escape.

She was too weary to go to draw water up in a gourd for the washing of her flushed, sweat-streaked face. Neither did she take time to pick the leaves and bits of twigs from her tumbled hair, which spread itself over her shoulders when she pulled off the calico cap.

Unfolding her mat, she dropped to her knees, sank sidewise, and slept.

X

WITH the afternoon sun standing tiptoe on the summit of Kias, there was a great humming before the long house of the chief—a humming as of a vast swarm of busy and excited bees. The third hunt was over, and three large, mat-wrapped bundles dangled from a beam of the big hut, ready to be swung down and parceled out among the people of Siru. Invited by the astonishingly generous captain of the Laura, the natives were gathering to eat at a mighty feast.

This was not to be merely a feast of island dishes, of which all were tired. In a snow-white cap and apron, with his sleeves rolled up to his armpits, Matt Scanlan, the chef of the expedition, was preparing a spread out of the schooner's supplies.

Pig there was to be, as at all South Sea feasts of the kind; and already two or three carcasses were cooking in the native manner—in a pit lined and roofed with hot stones, over which a heap of sweet-smelling leaves kept out the top layer of soil, steaming, and warm to the touch of the hand. But this fresh pork, stuffed with cooked brown rice, well salted, was intended mainly for the crew of the Laura. For the natives there was to be all the canned "bully beef" they could eat, with sardines by the case, biscuits out of cartons, tinned jams, hard candies, and other strange and much prized delicacies.

For the fetching of so many boxes Yer-rah had brought out a wheelbarrow, a relic of the days of Bainbridge, MacFee & Co. Long since the last bit of paint had disappeared from this antique relic. Its wheel wobbled treacherously, whining and creaking and crying out for oil, and making a snaky track along the path leading from the tents to the picnic ground. A man from the schooner held the handles, while two natives pulled a rope fastened to the axle. Returning empty, sundry small brown boys rode in the barrow, whooping with joy.

Since early afternoon, when the palms made only round shadows, most of Siru's inhabitants had been at the feasting place. They were not the bored, spiritless people whom the white visitors had met first, as was shown by their lively jabbering, the expectant shine and roll of dark eyes, and the drawing in of breath through rows of glistening teeth—this by way of showing satisfaction. Even Kooyah, the red-headed, now and then giving an anxious glance at Jennsen, who was seated on his own veranda, hung at the outskirts of the noisy gathering and forgot to look sulky.

The old men of the island sat with Lautaga, or on his stone terrace. They wore their brightest calico strips, and some had feathers thrust into their head coverings. They watched the scene soberly, did nothing, and gossiped. The middle-aged men were busy—lacing up the dance drums and making bamboo-flares, with which, later, the feast could be lighted. Squares of yellow, green, red, blue, or purple hid their hair, which was wreathed with flowers.

The matrons—young and old alike—were busiest of all. They laid down the five long pieces of clean canvas which were to serve as tablecloths, strewed them with

blossoms and ferns, and set them with the green leaves which were to be the individual plates, with shining tin pans for the food, and a double line of drinking gourds. For the seating of the guests, they flanked the cloth boards with native mats.

As for the younger folk of the village, they stood about or reclined, laughing, chattering, and making chaplets. In their festive dress they were as gaudy as orchids.

The girls were variously tall and short, heavy and slender. They wore their hair flowing. As with the young men who were their companions, their ankles and knees were circled with fringes of dry pods, which rattled at every move. All of these were to be dancers. Their cheeks were painted such a flaming red that they appeared to have patches of scarlet flannel pressed against the deep olive of their skin.

The children of the island raced about, getting in the way of their elders, handling everything, smelling the cases that tumbled at intervals out of the wheelbarrow, and shouting their excitement hilariously.

Seated together in the shade, Pollard and young Norton watched the lively scene, but talked of other things.

"I can imagine what's in Mr. Bainbridge's mind this afternoon," the latter was saying. "Five years of waiting, and now he's to have back his groves! Then can't you hear him as he goes crashing through the jungle like an elephant, calling for Sonsie MacFee?"

Pollard laughed.

"I've done some crashing myself," he reminded his companion; "and I've found it hard going, in spite of a cane. I'm afraid I'm not going to be of much use during the hunt."

"You're stronger than you think," declared the other; "but that path is all sand, isn't it? Your cane isn't any good. It goes right through."

"That's it. Just the same, I found the place where you saw her. I knew it from the background of your snapshot; and some ferns were broken down where she had walked."

"I'm just as satisfied that she's keeping out of reach until this business is settled," Philip Norton went on. "Things are going as well as anybody could expect. The feast's going to be a whale of a success. Morning will see changes on Siru. Then—"

"Then I can be of some use besides

cumbering the earth," added Pollard. "School will begin promptly every morning, after the usual dip in the ocean!"

Before the house of the chief there was a great hammering and creaking, as wooden cases were broken open and their tops pulled loose from the nails. The brown people massed themselves around the men who were wielding the hatchets, and cried out in delight as they caught sight of the contents of the boxes.

"I wonder what our friend Jennsen thinks of all this!" observed Pollard.

A strange light came into young Norton's blue eyes.

"To-night," he answered quietly, "I'm going to make that gentleman my particular job. He's responsible for that girl's suffering—all of it. He's the murderer of her father, too, and he was ready to do the same for Bainbridge. I'll remember it all, if I get my chance!"

Pollard laid a hand on his companion's arm.

"Don't kill, Philip," he said gently. "I give you my word, it would only be a load on you. You don't believe that now, feeling as you do about this man, but I know it would trouble you later on."

"Trouble me to finish off that bald old devil, or that cross-eyed, sneaking Kooyah? I don't think so, Pollard!"

"Yes—after the strain was over, and the whole thing was settled. I'm sure of it. Don't do anything like that, except as a last resort."

The elder Norton came strolling up, his cigar at a jovial angle.

"Looks like something's going to pop, doesn't it?" he asked, chuckling. "Lautaga's kept his secret in fine shape, and I believe his men are as unsuspecting as their pickaninnies."

His son looked grave.

"But to-morrow, what? I suppose some of those youngsters who are rattling around so lively over there will be scheming how to wipe us out, eh?"

"Can't tell," answered the captain. "That reminds me, Mr. Pollard—you're to take the first boat to the gore—the boat that Mrs. Norton goes in. When you land, keep her away from open ground."

"Count on me, sir!"

As Norton continued his sauntering, Jennsen left his veranda and came down to meet the captain. He showed neither distrust nor resentment.

"This is a first-class feast you're giving everybody to-night," he remarked, baring his fang in what was meant to be a cordial smile.

"Doing my best. We've enjoyed every hour ashore, and it's my chance to return Lautaga's hospitality." The skipper's smile was bland. "Besides, my men don't want to leave Siru without seeing how the young natives dance."

"Fine dancers!" pronounced Jennsen. "But don't be surprised, captain, if there's a little drinking along with the chow. You know natives. They like their toddy."

Captain Norton knit his brows.

"I don't let my men drink," he answered. "Picked 'em on just that test. I'll tell 'em to lay off of the stuff."

"Drinking sailors is why I'm against letting schooners hang around Siru," Jennsen continued. "They generally kick up some rumpus."

"That won't be the case this time," promised the skipper. "My men have got to break camp after the show."

"Likely to be dark," reminded Jennsen, with a sidewise cock of his long head.

"Can't help that," returned the captain. "I planned late work for 'em on purpose. Figured it would keep 'em steady if they knew they'd have something to do. Hope you'll join the party."

"For a while—thanks; but the dancing here is an old story to me."

"Naturally." Then with a careless veering toward the inconsequential: "Been a grand day, hasn't it? Sun just nice."

"Siru gets first-chop weather," Jennsen returned, waxing enthusiastic. "Never hot enough on this island to be what you'd call punkah pleasant."

As the skipper moved on, with a wave of the hand that was half a salute, Pollard looked seaward to hide a smile.

"That was a friendly encounter!" he said humorously.

"As long as he doesn't know that Bainbridge is within five thousand miles of here," returned young Norton, "it strikes me as strange that Jennsen hasn't mentioned the fact that there was a white girl on this island, and that she's missing, or asked us to go out and help locate her—just by way of giving us the gossip, if for nothing else."

"If he could be sure she was dead, he'd mention her quick enough," Pollard argued. "The fact that he's keeping mum about it

is proof to me that he thinks she's alive. Naturally, even though he may feel sure that we're all strangers, he's not going to let us talk with that girl if he can help it, or induce us to fine-comb the island for her. If we found her, and got the truth, he'd lose Siru. No, he's hanging on and playing a waiting game until we go!"

"Go?" repeated Philip Norton. "We're not going! Thank Heaven we can stay and fight him!"

Pollard glanced about him, and shook his head.

"Beauty, and fragrance, and peace," he said; "fullness and laughter, dancing and feasting and singing: but, waiting to have its chance—murder!"

XI

INTO the long, iron-bound, coffinlike gun box that stood at one side of his room, Ogilvie laid the last rifle he had cleaned. He covered the freshly loaded weapons with a couple of old and oil-stained shirts, and shut down the top of the box. When he had padlocked it, he left his hut, and, turning his back on the hum and rattle, the laughter and clatter, which rose almost in front of his own house, waddled over to Jennsen's.

"Guns are all ready," he announced in a low voice.

Jennsen, back on his veranda again, gave a slight lift to his heavy shoulders.

"Fixed for battle, eh?" he returned mockingly. "Well, you'll have your oiling and polishing for nothing!"

Ogilvie seated himself, locking his plump hands about one knee.

"I see you're not of my mind," he said, his tone a trifle sorrowful; "but look at that performance yonder!"

"What else do you think I'm looking at?" demanded Jennsen insolently. "Why, the scamps are opening cans!"

"I mean, can't you see what it's all for?"

"You can, of course." Jennsen was sarcastic. "You always know everything, don't you, Ogilvie? Norton's going to poison the natives, huh? Or maybe the cans are full of explosives!"

He showed all his big teeth in derision.

"I think I've got a good idea of what the schooner's up to," Ogilvie retorted stoutly. "I'm not a fool to get ready for it, either. Look at all the tinware they're giving the natives, not to mention the canned stuff!"

"All right," said Jennsen. "Go ahead and look at it, if you want to. What about it? Or are you going to be as mysterious as usual?"

Ogilvie was not to be laughed down.

"We've never given the natives such a blow-out. It makes us look like a couple of tightwads."

"I should worry!"

"All right! Anyhow, Norton's curried plenty of favor, and it's a good thing you took back your order about not talking to this outfit."

"Yes? Why?"

"Because the natives wouldn't have cared a rap whether you liked it or didn't. No order would have stopped 'em. They're crazy about the skipper."

"What if they are? What good will it do 'em? You're a wild croaker."

"Then you honestly think Norton's going? You believe it's his last night?"

"Of course! Green fruit has been going aboard every day, and fresh water. Don't let that imagination you're so proud of run away with you. They'll be away in the morning, and then I'll have some peace, for a change."

"Sorry I've bothered you!"

"No, you ain't. It's the way you entertain yourself. You get a thing on that brain of yours, and it sticks; so you have to clack and boohoo."

Ogilvie's lids shut down to hide his anger.

"You haven't heard any of 'em say a word about a white woman, have you?"

"No—and I guess she's a lot more afraid of 'em than you are, which is going some. Her old man never let her get a peep at strangers, and now I'm blamed glad he didn't. It's just about saved our skins!"

"I see!"

There was a covert note of amusement in Ogilvie's voice, but Jennsen ignored it.

"If these people knew anything about Sonsie, that captain's wife would probably have stuck in her nose by this time. Glad she ain't done that! I get too much of it as it is."

The inference was plain, but Ogilvie kept his temper.

"Also, maybe the captain's good-looking son might stick in *his* nose!"

Jennsen's chest swelled.

"I could run a knife into that bird," he asserted, "and enjoy doing it. I don't know when anybody's got under my skin the way he has."

He ground his teeth. It was an admission of his instinctive jealousy—of a rivalry that he would have denied hotly. Ogilvie understood his partner, and could not resist a cautious blow.

"Guess it's lucky Sonsie ain't around," he observed.

Jennsen disdained to take the hint.

"She'll never be able to keep away from this dance to-night," he continued. "She'll come sneaking up. Maybe she won't show herself, but she'll try to see what's going on. Kooyah and two or three of the boys are going to be on the lookout for her. If they run into her, I've told 'em to grab her, and to see that she don't yell."

Ogilvie gave a hissing laugh that expressed his scorn of the idea.

"She won't come around here," he declared with irritating sureness.

"What's the reason she won't?" Jennsen fired up. "She's probably not more'n a mile away."

"M-m-m-m!" Ogilvie put up his chin. His manner said that he had a correct solution of the mystery of the girl's whereabouts. "She's just a good half mile from here."

Jennsen became suddenly furious.

"Don't start your grunting!" he growled.

"The trouble with you is that when a man tries to tell you anything, you're such a smart Aleck! Well, get it out of your system. Come ahead!"

Ogilvie straightened up, folding his arms impressively.

"In a case of this kind," he said quietly, "I try to use my imagination—oh, laugh if you want to! I don't just get a likely idea and then hang on to it. I look at all the chances. I—"

"I! I! I!" taunted Jennsen. "Sure! You look at things in a big way! You're a hundred-percenter, ain't you, and so on, and so forth? I've heard it a million times; but what's on your chest to-day? I don't want to hear a lecture about how your grand brain works. I want your half-mile yarn straight out."

His voice trembled with anger. Ogilvie faced him, eyes shut, lips pursed. He fairly shone with importance.

"I believe," he said solemnly, "that Sonsie's on that boat!"

Ogilvie gave a forward nod of his head. For a moment Jennsen stared, wild-eyed.

"What are you talking about?" he cried

—so loud that at the feasting place heads were turned curiously in his direction.

"Sh-h-h! I'm just telling you how things strike me. I think she's on that schooner."

Jennsen seized the other man by a shoulder. "How do you know? Out with it!"

"Don't tear me to pieces!" With both hands, and by twisting his body, Ogilvie freed himself from that iron grip. "For Heaven's sake, Jennsen, keep your temper! Don't go clear crazy! I don't know. I'm giving you my opinion."

Jennsen laughed hoarsely.

"Your opinion!" he sneered.

Ogilvie rubbed his shoulder.

"Yes—Mrs. Norton has been all over the place, and Sonsie has seen her, as like as not. Well, the kid wouldn't be scared of a woman, and if she spoke to her, and told all she can tell, the first thing they'd do would be to put her where she'd be safe from you!"

For some minutes Jennsen pondered the argument.

"I see your point," he admitted presently. "As you say, if Sonsie went to this woman, and complained—say, that's an idea!"

Ogilvie was reassured and emboldened—flattered, too. Jennsen's quick change of attitude was nothing short of a victory. He puffed up noticeably.

"Yes, I thought you'd see it," he added complacently.

"I don't say it's so," put in Jennsen. "If they've got Sonsie out there, why don't Mrs. Norton stay out with her? Also, the second they had her, why didn't they haul up their anchor and get out? Because, if they stayed around here with the youngster aboard, we'd surely find out and make 'em a lot of trouble."

"They're trying to mislead us," Ogilvie argued; "but they don't fool me."

"But listen! Use your brain! If these people had anything to do with Bainbridge, they'd ask after the girl, wouldn't they?"

"Why ask after her if they've got her aboard? And that's where she's been these last two days, I tell you! They can take their time, all the while shipping bananas and oranges and coconuts, and loading up with water, like they don't know a white girl ever was on Siru. It's the best way to pull the wool over our eyes, and it's exactly the way I'd do if I was in their place. Sure, she's out yonder! You saw her

more'n two days ago, didn't you? Where's she been since? Out in the jungle? Bosh!"

Again Jennsen took a little time for thought.

"I'm glad this feast is on," he half whispered. "I'm going to pretend to go to bed early. I'll say good-by to Norton, and so on. Then I'll take a canoe, paddle out to the Laura, and just hang around and listen. Come to think of it, she was probably already on the ship when I found the orange peels."

Jennsen's change of attitude had now warmed Ogilvie to the melting point.

"You're dead right!" he vowed. "She made the swim that very morning. You know her—sharks wouldn't stop her."

"She hates me worse'n she hates sharks," replied Jennsen, and joined in Ogilvie's hearty laugh.

"But, Jennsen, suppose she ain't on deck to-night? They've got her hid where she can't be seen or heard—just bet on that! They won't let you go aboard. If you do, they won't let you hunt for her. They'll say she ain't there—that they haven't even seen her. Then how are you going to manage?"

Jennsen lowered his bald head between his shoulders and fixed his look on the bamboo floor.

"I don't know. I'll have to decide when I see how things fall. If I knew for certain that she was out there, she'd come off to me, or I'd shoot anybody that stood in my way—and her to boot!"

He clamped his big jaws.

"A-a-a-ah!" breathed Ogilvie, nodding approvingly. "Now you're talking! Of course she's there! Jennsen, are you ripe for a big scheme?"

"Another one of those whale ideas of yours?" Jennsen inquired, sarcastic.

But Ogilvie waved a careless hand.

"Don't laugh. I'm thinking in terms of the Pacific. Here we have Siru, and a fortune in copra every year. Now instead of going out, the way we've talked, and putting thousands of dollars into a schooner—tying up all that good money that might be working for us—"

"Well?"

Ogilvie lowered his voice; and now he revealed his cruel depravity, and proved the truth of what Captain Norton had said about him.

"Whether they've got Sonsie out yonder

or not," he declared, "I say let's take the Laura to-night!"

Jennsen guffawed.

"So that's why you been telling me all this stuff!" he exclaimed. "You scare me about Sonsie so's I'll say yes to wiping out this whole crowd!"

"When will we have another chance like this?" Ogilvie demanded. "'Most everybody will be ashore. The majority of 'em'll be drunk. You know what native toddy is with a white man. Anyhow, I've put every gallon where the Kanakas can have it. Jennsen, the way we're fixed, we can take that schooner without a bit of danger to ourselves!"

"But suppose Sonsie never was near 'em?" the other man objected.

"Let's go ahead with the idea that she is. We need a schooner, don't we, Sonsie or no Sonsie?"

"In other words," persisted Jennsen, "what you're advising now is wholesale murder."

"Call it what you want to. When we've got the ones who're ashore, we can fix the balance easy. Any yelling here will go as the natural thing, being as there's a feast—don't you see? And we'll have a first-class boat!"

"Ogilvie," Jennsen began confidentially, "more'n once I've called you an old woman. That's because you're like one—like a bad old woman, ready to bite on the sly!"

"Bah! I hate women!"

"You hate 'em because you understand 'em, white or brown—the bad ones, anyhow; but as sure as death and taxes, along with the little meanness of some old she-devil, you've got the tricks of the lowest men that draw breath!"

Ogilvie's neck stiffened.

"I'm not afraid to go ahead with my idea," he countered.

"Now don't start that kind of talk!" warned Jennsen. Of a sudden he changed. Authority came into his voice. "I don't want any hinting around here. If you think I'm a coward—"

"I didn't say that."

"That's the trouble—you never say anything. You ain't got the nerve. What you've got is a nasty way of coming close to an insult without going so far that I'll knock you down!"

"Now, let's not quarrel, Jennsen! I don't like quarreling."

"I know what you like. You like the soft stuff to a person's face; but when he turns, you can do the rottenest thing that a human being is able to think up!"

"You've certainly got a good opinion of me! What about yourself?"

"You mean MacFee, I suppose; but of course you never can say out what you mean. It's just hint, hint, hint! Well, don't forget, Ogilvie, that you was in on the MacFee job, too. You got your fair half of everything Mac had—and a bonus to let me take the house."

"That's all right. Sure, I got my share; but don't let your voice out so much. You know, sounds carry easy at this time of the day."

"Let's get back to that schooner idea of yours, because I like to talk over your wonderful notions, which are as wide as the Pacific. Suppose we got her—what could we do with her? Put a match to her?"

Ogilvie was astounded.

"Not at all! Not at all! I should say not! We could change her name easily enough, couldn't we? I'll bet there's plenty of paint aboard."

Jennsen wagged his head.

"I love to hear you babble," he declared.

"Cut off, the way I am, from all other kinds of entertainment, what would I do without you?"

"Babble?" repeated Ogilvie, trying to make his tone playful.

"You talk like one awful fool!" said Jennsen bluntly.

Ogilvie reddened.

"What's wrong with the whole idea?" he insisted. "You've killed a man or two in your time. Are you going to hem and haw over putting two or three more out of the way?"

"I'm not going to hem and haw over anything; but can't you see that if we carried out this proposition of yours, the whole village would have the goods on us?"

"That's a funny argument, Jennsen! We never fooled 'em about MacFee."

"Maybe not. The point is, they can't prove that. If they could, any time Lautaga took the notion, he could turn me over, tied up, to some schooner, and be free of me for good."

"Lautaga needn't live forever!" suggested Ogilvie.

Jennsen swore softly.

"There you go again with another fool idea—killing the old man. Don't you real-

ize that these natives ain't idiots? They understand blackmail. If I was in a plot to put the old boy out of the way, I'd be the slave of this bunch of savages the balance of my life, instead of being boss."

"If they're in on it too?" questioned Ogilvie.

Jennsen would not discuss the matter further by pointing out that natives might turn state's evidence, or that Mrs. Norton would prove an obstacle, in case the native women resented her being killed.

"It's a lucky thing for you," he declared, "that you've had me here to keep you going straight since you struck Siru. If you'd been here alone, by now you'd have your neck in a halter!"

Ogilvie felt himself dismissed. He rose. On his tongue was a final sting:

"Well, I feel certain Sonsie's out there, and it ain't likely they'll turn her over to you—at least, not when a fine, strapping young chap's aboard who'll think her mighty pretty!"

It was the kind of thing to make Jennsen writhe with jealousy, but the other man did not speak the words. Instead, he was both diplomatic and pacifying.

"Guess I'm silly to think the kid's on the Laura. I suppose, if we had the schooner, we wouldn't know how to run her, and we couldn't explain where we got her—to Brunnei, or the other gang at Pontianak. Also I shouldn't wonder if we won't find Sonsie when the schooner goes. She was always such a shy little thing!"

At his partner's unexpected and complete capitulation, Jennsen was plainly gratified.

"Good boy!" he returned. "Go home now and pound your ear. You pussyfooted around a lot last night, remember; so get some sleep, and enjoy a sweet dream of a nice, juicy murder!"

Ogilvie showed his small teeth in a grin, and went. He had forced himself to put on the best possible face; but he was raw and smarting from abuse and ridicule.

As he made back slowly to his own hut, the keg-shaped dance drums were beginning to beat their accompaniment to the first barbaric song of the feast. Flares were lighting the lively scene, and upward roared the flames of a mammoth bonfire of coconut coir. Ogilvie, however, did not turn his half shut eyes in that direction.

"Trouble is, I got no rights," he complained angrily. "I'm part owner here,

and I can't call my soul my own. Well, it's time there was a change!"

Having failed to send Jennsen on an errand that might get him into serious trouble, now there came to him a second idea, monstrous, yet tempting. Inside his door he halted, his face quivering, to turn it over in his mind.

"Why not?" he whispered. "Why not? I'll have all the cash we got hid away, instead of just half, and I'll be free. Here's my chance, because when will another schooner come this way? The boys all know that Jennsen's sore on the strangers, and they'll be willing to believe anything I tell 'em. He said himself that it's best never to tell natives the low-down about your business. All right! I'll take his advice. I'll go on my own this time, and they won't suspect, because I'll blame the schooner's people. Yes, it's the best thing to do, and I'll do it this very night!"

XII

On her mat behind the low, outspreading shrub that hid the door of her retreat, Sonsie sat listening. She was not interested in such sounds as were close by—the squeak of a marauding flying fox, the jabbering of some monkey that was perhaps being hunted by a snake, the grunt and rustle of a wild boar, and the cautious call of night birds. She was keeping track of the regular sounding of the Laura's bells.

Suddenly a new sound sought her out where she waited. It was a steady thrumming, like the beat of the heart of the island itself. It set the heart of the white girl to leaping. With a low exclamation, out she crawled, and stood.

"The drums!"

Roo-oo-oom! Roo-oo-oom! Roo-oo-oom!
Wave on wave, through the warm, fragrant air, they rolled out their deep music; and like billows of water the rhythmic tones broke against the guttered face of Kias. The mountain repeated them, sending them back in echoes across moss-green Siru, now mantled by the dark.

"What do they drum for?"

But at once she guessed. To those before the long house of Lautaga, the heavy beats meant joy and capering. To Sonsie they carried a different message—one that blanched her face. On a certain occasion, several years before, a schooner about to depart from Siru had been speeded with a feast.

"This ship, she goes away!" she whispered. "And I be left!" The thought was anguishing. At her feet were all her possessions—her mat, the mosquito net, some bits of calico, the photograph of her father, and her food. She caught up only the picture, hastily thrust it under her turban, and made down across the high stretch of hemp-grown ground to the edge of the jungle.

There she halted, troubled and irresolute.

"I must go to that ship!" she told herself. "But—how do I go?"

Though the stars were set thickly in the dome of the sky overhead, giving some light, before her the wall of the jungle was black. Even on a night of bright moonlight, that solidly set belt of growth, as she knew, could not be penetrated—no, not if in either hand she had a torch.

"The path is all gone," she murmured. "I have forget about that!"

She faced toward Kias, and slowly started back to the rock.

"I must not stay here!" she cried out loud. "That ship must not go without me! Oh, ship, *don't* go before I get to you!"

She did not return to the shelter where she had lived so long, but went on toward the stream. Down near its mouth, where it moated the gore, it was wide and silent. Where Sonsie stood, it was a narrow torrent, tossing its way seaward. She knew that its blackness would equal that of the jungle, and there was peril to face before her bare feet would touch it. Nevertheless, as she hurried, she thought of it as a broad, easy road to the schooner.

She came near to it with her hands in front of her, to fend off branches from her face. Soon the voices of the river were louder in her ears, so that they all but drowned the sound of the drums. She approached the brink cautiously, testing her way, first with one foot, then with the other. When she encountered ferns and bamboos, she got down on all fours and felt out a path with her hands.

As she continued to lay her palms flat, she soon found that before her was only air. Now she was kneeling on the very edge of the steep, high bank. Carefully she felt about her, measuring the size of each vine that led downward. She found one of a good thickness, pulled it, and satisfied herself that it was strong and long. Then she grasped it firmly with both hands,

swung around with her back to the inky cañon, slowly lowered herself over the edge, and, one hand following another, began her descent, not failing to use her bare toes.

The vine began to taper. Hanging against the wall of the river, as if in a deep well, she clung by one hand and both feet while she hunted a second vine. To this she transferred her weight. She slipped and slid downward, rested, and traveled again, but only by inches, for she was tiring.

Not once did she glance beneath her, where nothing was to be seen. She was not afraid, for the growing murmur of the tumbling water assured her that she was gradually nearing its surface. Fearing only the lava rocks that were washed by the stream, she combated her impatience, though her hands ached.

When at last one foot touched the water, and she knew that she had come down at a spot where the bank went sheer into the river, with a deep breath of thankfulness she let go of the last vine and changed one element for another.

At this point the stream was deep and swift; but to the island-bred girl the new element was more natural than the first. In it she was like a fish. Keeping her turban dry, she let the current carry her swiftly along.

At first the water was cold, and she felt some discomfort, being warm from her work; but soon she became accustomed to the temperature, and found herself refreshed. Once she came against a bank in the dark, for she had been carried into an eddy. Here she rested for a few moments, her eyes raised to the stars, her face smiling. Then she struck out into mid stream again, and pushed on.

"A-a-a-ah!"

She turned a bend and saw, out in the dark before her, a light that she felt sure was on the schooner. With a gurgle of satisfaction, and with her strength renewed by hope, she swam on more swiftly than before. Soon she passed the fringe of mangroves that marked the river's mouth, and was spluttering at the taste of salt water.

"Ow-ah!" she could not help crying.

Leaving the gorge behind her, the sand spit showed in the starlight at her right hand, marking the tip of the gore. Then this and the mangroves receded into the

background, and all about her was the sea. Putting the photograph between her teeth, so that she could keep it dry, she turned on her back to float.

"No hurry for me now!" she told herself happily.

Stretched upon the quiet sea, she listened to the beat of the drums, the chorused song of the feasters, and the clap, clap, clap, of scores of hands.

"They have a good time this night," she thought. "That makes them all forget about me!"

She knew precisely what she would do, and, with the schooner's people still on shore, she felt that she had plenty of time for the execution of her plan. She had thought of sharks, but even that could not make her resolve to run any chances by waiting near the launch on the beach. As Jennsen had said, she feared him far more than the sharks. She meant, in easy stages, to swim on to where the Laura was anchored and wait for an opportunity to climb aboard.

"If a shark finds me before I do that," she said philosophically, "I can't help it. Anyhow, I don't go back on Siru!"

From thoughts so painful she turned to pleasanter ones, dwelling on her plans for inducing the captain of the schooner to keep her aboard.

"I work for him," she asserted stoutly. "I don't care how hard I have to do, just the same I do it!"

About her, on the smooth sea, the stars were reflected. She smiled up at them confidently. Then, suddenly, the breath was driven from her lungs and she was hurled sidewise on the water—as against her body, in its drenched calico dress, was launched some huge, dark, swift-going thing.

As she caught her breath, she threshed with all her might, and, her mouth now being empty, for the photograph so dear to her was afloat near by, she uttered a piercing scream.

It was Jennsen in an outrigger, and for an instant he was almost as startled as Sonsie; but after that he acted promptly. Once more propelling the canoe against her, with a deep laugh of satisfaction he tore away her turban in an effort to seize her, and then thrust his big fingers into the still dry silk of her hair.

"I thought so!" he chuckled. "Sonsie,

and making for the schooner, eh? Well, I guess not!"

She struggled desperately, beating the water into foam, and trying to cry out. To quiet her, he calmly pushed her under the surface, so that his arm was in the sea to his shoulder.

As he held her head under, up came her white feet, to float against the canoe. Even as he grinned at them, he noted that she was no longer struggling. Instantly he pulled her head into the air.

"Want to drown, do you?" he demanded angrily. "Rather go down than go back? Well, you're going to live a while yet, young lady!"

Leaning his weight in the opposite direction, to balance hers, he hauled her, limp and choking, into the outrigger, and flung her forward across the thwart. After that, taking time to look about him, but particularly in the direction of the Laura, he began to paddle leisurely, going parallel with the shore.

He even whistled as he worked. After a year of sullen waiting, the runaway was in his hands!

He kept a lookout for the piled-up outriggers on the beach. When he spied them as a dark mass on the lighter background of the sand, he turned his canoe at right angles and made toward them. Close to the shore, he drove the boat with all his might, rode through the gentle surf with a rush, and thrust the prow into the sand. He climbed overside. Standing with the water washing his shoes, he bent and grasped Sonsie about the waist. She was only half conscious; but as if his touch was so hateful to her that it wakened her to life, she instantly lifted herself, found her feet, and tried to throw herself backward into the sea.

"Oh, no, you don't, young lady!" remarked Jennsen.

His long arms caught her up and swung her across his hip, where her body rested, describing a crescent. Then using one hand to hold her, with the other he dragged his boat out of the shallow water and across the sand. While he splashed and hauled, Sonsie, half swooning, gasped out her despairing plea:

"Jennsen! I don't want to live no more! Jennsen, you kill me! Please, Jennsen! I like best for to die!"

Through the ranks of the leaning cocoanuts, from where the bamboo torches flared,

came the loud booming of the drums, the rattling of the pods, the rhythmical thudding of dancing feet, the constant laughter, shouting, and chanting. All this joyous uproar was a perfect screen for Sonsie's voice, and for her captor's.

"Oh, I know you'd like to die!" he told her calmly.

He swung her down, letting her thump against the sand, and held her with one hand. From the canoe he took some short lengths of rope.

Lying exhausted, in a little tumbled heap, with her brine-soaked hair straggling over her face, she began to beg him again:

"Jennsen, don't tie me! You kill me, Jennsen!"

He laughed.

"Awful anxious to die, ain't you?" he scoffed.

"Oh, yes!"

He bound her wrists together, and then her ankles. All the while, her voice trembling pitifully she entreated:

"Don't! No good for you to tie me, Jennsen! Listen! The first time I can, I kill myself!"

As he knelt beside her, though the light was dim, and she could see only his outline, she knew how he looked—old, bald, ugly, and unshaven.

"Maybe you will," he answered her cheerfully, "and maybe you won't. Don't be so sure!"

"I will! I will!"

"You'll go with me," he declared.

"Awful sorry you don't like me, but I guess you'll get over that."

"I hate you!" Sonsie cried. "I hate you!"

"Get up!" he commanded, forgetting that her feet were bound together.

"No! I don't!"

Weak as the girl was, and helpless, she found delight in defying him.

With a wrenching jerk, he brought her upstanding. Then he shook her, and her long hair whipped her face and his.

"I'll learn you whether you'll mind me or not!" he vowed, suddenly enraged, and baring all his big teeth.

Sonsie put the last remnant of her strength into her cry:

"Help! Jennsen's killing me! Help!"

(To be concluded in the October number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

A WORKING CREED

If we must judge our fellow men,
And through our verdicts find them wanting,
Let us not lose our tempers when
They hint our views a form of vaunting
Ourselves as better or more wise
Than those we choose to criticize.

To earn the right to judge or preach,
We must be brave enough to follow
Beyond a point glib tongues can reach—
To height as well as sheltered hollow—
Or yield to braver men the goal
Visioned by proxy of the soul.

And if, by chance, some one of us
Sees clearer than ten thousand others,
Let him not waste his breath to fuss
Over the fumbling of his brothers,
But learn that quietly to lead
The blind creates a working creed.

Richard Butler Glaenser

The Priestess of the Purple Petunia

HOW A LITTLE DISPUTE OVER A TRAIN COMPARTMENT PROVED
TO INVOLVE MUCH MORE IMPORTANT MATTERS

By Margaret Busbee Shipp

MAJOR CHETWOODE had engaged his berth to Calcutta several days in advance, but the station master explained to him that two American ladies had the compartment until they reached Mogul Serai, where they were to change for Benares. So when he got on the train at the station before Mogul Serai he found a seat in another car, which was already crowded, but had his Indian bearer put his belongings—bedding roll, bags, and polo sticks—into the compartment which was shortly to be vacated.

On reaching Mogul Serai, the major's bearer came to his master with a look of utter bewilderment on his usually impassive face, not wholly accounted for by his report that the mem-sahibs were not going to Benares at all, but straight on to Calcutta, and were staying obdurately where they were. Their Hindu bearer was in despair because of this sudden change of plan, as he had counted on going with them to Benares at the time of the lunar eclipse, when the sacred Ganges is even more than ordinarily sacred.

Chetwoode had little interest in their servant's disappointment. He was vexed enough at having to explain matters to the two American women, who were probably unused to trains in India. There was half an hour's wait at Mogul Serai, so there was plenty of time for them to alter their plans again and take the train for Benares when it arrived. The train to Calcutta was crowded, and the major would have to sit up all night unless he could secure the place which was rightfully his.

Where distances are so long and days so hot, travel in India is arranged with special

regard to comfort by night. On the mail trains the first-class compartments are big and roomy, each fitted with a bathroom, in which there is a tub or a shower. There are two long couches, upholstered in leather, placed lengthwise. Each person brings his own bedding roll, with sheets, pillow, blanket, and even mattress, and his Indian bearer makes up his bed at night and puts it out of the way in the bedding roll by day.

Annoyed that the foreigners thought possession was ten-tenths of the law, but secure in his rights as a Britisher who had reserved his place in advance, Chetwoode entered the apartment.

His military training stood him in good stead. Without the habit of self-control he would have gasped with surprise at the apparition before him—an astonishing figure to encounter on a dustily prosaic train.

She was young and amazingly pretty, but far more than amazingly garbed. Her robe—he supposed it was a robe—was a shimmering, shaded purple, deepening from mauve and wistaria to the royal color of Tyre. It billowed about her feet, half concealing her purple silk sandals, and fell away from her arms, which were bare and white and slenderly lovely.

"I am awfully sorry to disturb you," he began.

Her slender hand silenced him with an imperious gesture.

"Salaam!" she commanded.

He did nothing of the sort. He overlooked her mistake.

"I was saying that I regret the necessity for intrud—"

"Salaam!" she cut him short, as one not accustomed to having her authority ques-

tioned. "I am the Priestess of the Purple Petunia." She turned to the other occupant of the car, with a scarcely veiled threat in her rippling voice: "Salaam! Instruct our visitor in fitting courtesy by your example."

A bright-eyed elderly woman rose with distinct grimness and made an exceedingly stiff and awkward salaam. The veriest sweeper's brat in all India could have done it better.

Chetwoode turned to her more hopefully.

"You are going to Benares, I understand? I have this compartment to Calcutta. Your train will be leaving in half an hour, so if your companion wishes to— to change her robe, I will go outside and return later; but you will have to hurry."

Before the older woman could reply, the girl spoke authoritatively:

"You will not go. You will remain. You will serve me. That is the purpose for which you have come. You are the charioteer of the Peacock Car. Open that roll!"

She pointed to a bulging holdall, secured with two straps. It was very knobby and protuberant, and seemed to have been done up rather badly.

"Open that quickly, charioteer!"

Major Chetwoode grew a degree more stiff-necked.

"I'll call your bearer," he suggested.

Already the girl seemed to have forgotten her request.

"Call me Amethyst," she said, so gently, so prettily, that he thought of poor little mad *Ophelia*.

It was increasingly evident that this lovely, imperious creature was stark mad. With a veering mood, she turned to the elderly woman, who was regarding her with a marked lack of sympathy, and stamped her foot.

"Why are you gaping at me like that? Minion! Slave! Scum of the foam, trash rejected by the sweeper, remember you are vowed to serve! Open that roll!"

"There isn't time," protested Chetwoode. "The train to Benares—"

But grudgingly, unwillingly, the elder woman was bending over the holdall and fumbling with the straps.

"Is it necessary for you to obey her?" he asked in a low voice.

She nodded acquiescence, as she tugged at the tight straps. Chetwoode stood with his arms folded. He would not have a part in such nonsense.

The girl in purple sat on the floor, spread the holdall like a blanket, and began to undo bundle after bundle—teakwood elephants from Delhi, lacquer from Jaipur—carved wood from Kashmir, saris and sandalwood from Surat, a poshteen from Peshawar—until at last she found the old brass lantern for which she was searching. She lifted it over her head, swinging it slowly seven times and chanting a queer, rapid jargon which was unfamiliar to Chetwoode, though he knew half a dozen vernaculars.

Time was slipping by, but there are circumstances in which a gentleman is helpless.

At length she sprang to her feet, holding her lantern high above her sunny hair.

"I am the Priestess of the Purple Petunia," she chanted. "In the night my lantern will have no eyes, it will be blind. There will be strange things to see, for he who talks little *may talk less*, but my lantern will be blind and asleep." She turned disdainfully to the older woman. "Pack them up, and quickly!"

With lips set tight together, the older woman began to gather up the packages. Chetwoode would have been inhuman not to have helped her, and finally he had them all back in the holdall, though so much more bulgingly and protuberantly than before that he decided her bearer must be a remarkable packer.

"Thank you," said the older woman, her voice curiously unsteady.

"Not accustomed to even a little chance kindness!" thought the man.

"You may go away now, woman," said the girl indifferently. "You need never come back, unless you wish. I do not need you—you who think you are my keeper. You did not think I heard? You thought I was asleep? The Petunia never sleeps. Now that I have the charioteer, he can wait on me and tie up my bundles over and over and over and over and over!"

"I'll be damned if I will!" determined Chetwoode, but inaudibly. He turned to the nurse—or keeper, or whatever might be her ghastly job—and said: "I'll buzz off and find a place somewhere. My bearer will come for my things."

He had an uneasy feeling that it was unwise to leave his polo sticks there even for a few moments—too convenient for poor Amethyst to crack her guardian's head!

"Sorry to have inconvenienced you," he said, addressing the elderly lady. "Er—sorry!"

That was meant to include the whole tragic situation.

The girl clasped the lapel of his coat.

"You are leaving me, charioteer? And shall I never, never drive in the Peacock Car, with the perfume of petunias making the morning sweet?"

Extraordinary, but there really seemed to be a purplish tinge in the blue depths of her eyes!

"Good-by, *Ophelia*," he said kindly, and hastily corrected himself. "Amethyst, I mean!"

After he went out, his bearer came in and removed his master's belongings, with open disapproval and impeccable dignity.

II

THE train to Benares was late, so the wait at Mogul Serai stretched out longer. Chetwoode was walking up and down the platform when he recognized an old Indian conjurer whom he had once greatly befriended—a ragged, turbaned man, with brilliant black eyes, teeth stained red with betel nut, and a tiny drum, on which he was beating monotonously.

Fakr-ud-din glanced up, saw Chetwoode, and prostrated himself, touching the ground with his forehead.

"Preserver of the poor," he cried, "the hour is ripe for me to return thanks for the inestimable favors you have bestowed upon this unworthy slave and his miserable home. Now I see your fortune clear, which unto this hour has been hidden from me as if covered by the waters of the Jumna. There has been decreed for you, huzoor, a happy marriage, great gold, fair and honorable sons, and a daughter." The change in the conjurer's tone was as if he tossed in a daughter carelessly, for good measure. "The hours march swiftly toward you, huzoor, bringing these good gifts, though all of them smaller than your great merit."

"Fine promises, Fakr-ud-din!" replied Chetwoode in the man's own vernacular. "Many thanks! Shall I give you a rupee now for so much good fortune, or shall I send you twenty when it comes true?"

To Chetwoode's surprise, instead of eagerly clutching at the extended rupee, the man's burning gaze seemed to seek something far beyond him.

"I see water, very far away, and above it a kingfisher is flying. Purple and blue meet in its feathers, as they meet in the eyes of thy bride. I will await the twenty

rupees, huzoor, but, as I am old and very poor, I am glad that I shall not have to wait long."

"Plucked that idea of purple in a girl's eyes right out of my mind," thought Chetwoode amusedly. "How does the oldascal manage to do it?"

It was a very hot night, a breathless sort of a night. After midnight, when the train made one of its long station stops, cramped from his seat in the crowded car, Chetwoode went outside to stretch his legs. He chanced to stop to light a cigarette just as he was passing the compartment in which he had that curious encounter. A delicious bubble of laughter floated toward him, a sound as arresting as a bird's note, followed by an appealing—

"Aunt Meg, you were such a glorious sport! I'll never forget your expression as you made that first salaam, not if I live to be a hundred! I'm glad I can just lie here and laugh, for it's too hot to sleep. Headache better, dear?"

"Yes, but my conscience is troubling me about the way that young man was ousted from his rightful place."

"And so good-looking, and so stiff-necked, and so accustomed to exacting obedience! Why, I could almost obey him myself!"

Chetwoode, who had stood rooted to the spot by the revelation of how he had been duped, suddenly realized that he was eavesdropping, and turned away; but he stopped long enough at the telegraph office to send a telegram before he went back to his place.

The train reached Calcutta at six in the morning, a rather agreeable hour on a bright, balmy morning in February. Chota hazri—the morning cup of coffee and a piece of toast—had been served in their compartment, so Patsy and her aunt were feeling quite fit as they emerged, with their Indian bearer following, directing the customary swarm of coolies who scrambled to get their bags. To Patsy's utter amazement, Major Chetwoode stood waiting. He bowed ceremoniously.

"Your obedient charioteer. The Peacock Car is waiting for you, Amethyst."

Now it was absolutely evident that this man was a gentleman. It was as plain to be seen in his face and bearing as to find the Washington Monument in the girl's native city; and though shamefaced and astonished, Patsy longed to see it through.

Chetwoode took charge of the situation with admirable *sang froid*. He turned to her aunt.

"I am Major Chetwoode," he said. "Your niece is going for a spin with me down the Strand Road and around the Gariahat Road. We will come by for you at nine, if you will both do me the honor of breakfasting with me."

"It's only six o'clock now," objected the bewildered aunt. "What are you going to do until nine?"

Chetwoode's smile made his rather stern young face look more boyish.

"I don't know what *she* is going to do. I am going to scold her. You admit that she deserves it?"

Aunt Meg rallied, like the good sport she was.

"Indeed I do admit it," she returned emphatically, "and I shall be glad to breakfast with you."

Patsy followed Chetwoode meekly to where his chauffeur was waiting with his roadster; but it wasn't the rakish new car that claimed the girl's attention—it was the tiny enameled peacock fastened on the hood, and the great basket of petunias, in every shade of purple, that adorned the seat.

"The Peacock Car, the perfume of petunias, and your humble charioteer," he said, as he helped her in.

"Then you knew all along that I wasn't a perfect lady lunatic?" she demanded. "Truly and honestly it wasn't just plain piggishness! It was a combination of—of solicitude and bravado." Patsy began to talk very fast, her cheeks very pink. "You see, we were to get off at Benares, but Aunt Meg developed an excruciating headache, and there were such throngs of pilgrims at the stations, because of the lunar eclipse, that she decided to go straight on to Calcutta. Just then your man came in with your luggage, and she knew it would be impossible for us to stay where we were or to get another compartment on that crowded train. An idea came into my mind. 'I can manage it,' I said. 'All I ask is for you to promise to do anything I say.' She promised readily enough, and I slipped on that odd negligee, because, when I wore it at college, the girls used to call me the Purple Petunia. The idea of making you think I was crazy just suddenly *grew* in my thoughts. The gibberish I talked was a language my brother taught me when I was little. You really guessed all along?"

Then it was his turn to make a clean breast, ending with his telegram to his servant, who had gone to work, as ordered, to fix an enameled peacock paper weight to the hood of the car, and to bribe a sleepy florist to cut flowers at an unearthly hour.

The car sped on, a fairy chariot of youth and laughter and nonsense.

III

SMALL wonder that Aunt Meg was abusing herself roundly for being a trusting and romantic fool to let her favorite niece go off with a perfectly strange young man! Here it was five minutes past eleven, and he had said they would be back at nine. She couldn't even remember the heathenish name of that road they were going on. She probably ought to call up the police, and—

And there they were at the end of the corridor, just as she was beginning to be nervous!

They seemed absolutely oblivious of the fact that they were late, utterly unaware that a cup of restaurant coffee and a bite of toast was not sufficiently sustaining to last from six to eleven; yet about them there was such a splendid glow, such a vibrating youthfulness!

Patsy was swinging a basket of petunias, and her pretty laugh rippled like moonlight on water, thought Aunt Meg, who had grown up in the gentle sentimentality of the Victorian age. She had never seen Patsy look like that—starry-eyed, almost remote in the radiance about her.

"Darling Aunt Meg, we're engaged!"

"Engaged?" Aunt Meg's voice rose sharply with incredulity and anxiety. "Patsy, I never heard of such absurdity, such rashness—"

"Oh, but it isn't rash, precious—not in the least *rash*," Patsy interrupted eagerly. "It's just the way both of us have planned it for years. Don always swore he was going to propose to a girl at ten o'clock in the morning, because things get such false values on a ravishing night, between two enchanting waltzes. He said that when he wanted a woman to be his wife at ten o'clock in the morning, he would know it was the real thing. It was thrilling, the last eight minutes, sitting there waiting for it to be ten o'clock, so that he could propose, with our eyes glued on my wrist watch! And you know I've always said I wanted a man to fall in love with just *me*, Patsy, and not know anything about the

money until afterward. Don had to stop at the post office to send twenty rupees to an old Indian conjurer, who told him he was going to marry a girl with purple in her eyes. He actually did, Aunt Meg, and I was so pleased I sent him twenty, too. Don said the old fellow told him he was to have 'great gold,' so he supposed a philanthropic movement to raise army pay checks would be the next thing in order, as his lucky star seemed to be in the ascendant. Then I told him how glorious it was to marry a man who didn't even know I was

grandfather's granddaughter! Don't you see, Aunt Meg, how well advised, how almost premeditated, everything is? In fact, I think the papers will call it a balanced union!"

"They are more apt to say that I kidnapped her," hazarded Chetwoode cheerfully.

"After starving her aunt and natural protector into submission," amended Aunt Meg, somewhat tartly. "But we have this comfort—whatever they say will sound more credible than the truth. I am thankful the real facts can never get into print!"

Divine Luck

HOW JEREMY COLE'S WORST FAILURES WERE MAGICALLY
TURNED INTO HIS GREATEST SUCCESSES

By Katherine Haviland Taylor

THERE are brave souls who will walk under a ladder or open their umbrellas in the vestibule, and who will tell you that superstition is a relic of the times when devils were frightened afar by the beat of tom-toms, and when the gods were pleased by the offering of a good, fresh, tender citizen. These people—these sensible souls—look for no pins, and, if they chance to see any, they do not stoop to pick them up. They assert in strong, clear voice tones that there is no such thing as luck.

Well, this may be true, but if luck was not as close to Jeremy Cole as his long, lean shadow, then I do not know Chinese red from ultramarine; and I do know these colors apart, having dealt with them for a good part of my fair stretch of working years.

Happenings that would have made most men stumble, if they did not altogether floor them, only took Jerry up a peg. He never knew this. He walked as a child in the sunlight that was upon his life. He accepted everything with the simple faith that was born in him.

Only one thing happened to him that he spoke of as "luck"—"divine luck," he

called it, in a voice that was conscious as well as a trifle thickened; and that one thing he deserved, if ever a man did deserve the love of a woman.

Jerry lived cleanly. I know it, because I knew him well during those years when a man plants his wild oats, if he's ever going to plant them. Once and again he would be with me while some windy young *Lochinvar* told tales of his none too gallant adventures. Always, then, Jerry would listen with interest—a rather detached, lifeless interest. He never chimed in on the general epilogue that sometimes follows such moments. While others, fearing to be surpassed, murmured, "God, in *my* day—" or, "Well, let me tell *you*, a few years ago, *I* lived," Jerry was silent.

I noticed his silence, because even then I had employed men long enough to have gained the habit of studying them. It was a quizzical silence, and after I knew him better I knew that he was amused. He was an old man, then—at twenty-five. I think he would have been an old man until he died, had not—if I may be allowed so romantic an allegory—the fairy story been reversed, and his princess awakened him with her kiss.

But let us get at the history of Jerry Cole and his luck.

He came into the office of the *Star and Journal* at the time when there was a staff of artists, instead of photographers. I was managing them, and they were the devil to manage—jealous, touchy, lazy, always kicking about the way their work was reproduced, and always drawing their salaries ahead. I think, looking back, that I had a particularly choice bunch that year. I know my indigestion dates from that time, and indigestion, as any student of it knows, is not made by food alone.

Well, I looked up from a sketch of an old bridge that one of my men had just brought in. It was a bridge that we felt should be condemned—local politics were involved—and the brat had made it look as if it had been built the week before. Naturally I was in a fuming, touchy mood.

"What the devil is it?" I asked of the long, stoop-shouldered, lean-faced boy who looked at me across the gate.

"Some one who does better work than any one you have on now," he answered in his characteristic drawl.

A little soothed, as one sometimes is by great effrontery, I invited him in. We talked for half an hour. I can't remember what about now, but I know that he left with a job, and that he left me in a good temper.

He worked along for a month, and he was right about his ability. He had it—real ability. There wasn't a man on the staff who touched him. At the end of the month he came to me with a queer proposition. There was a small house down in lower New York that he wanted to buy. He had, he explained consciously, a personal feeling for it—a sentimental attachment, if you like. His mother had lived in that house in her early married life; but to get the house he would have to buy the two adjoining houses, too.

"Then I suppose you won't get it," I said, for the figures were, as I thought then, staggering.

"I'll have to take the three," he said, wagging his head solemnly; "but it does make it a proposition."

How he did it I don't know. No other man could have done it. He scratched up enough for his first payment, in another six months he borrowed for the next, and then Gill & Co., who had seemed about ready to fade out, decided that they would add to

their old store. Well, they did, and they came to life, as you know; and I think their leather goods department is about where the two old houses stood.

If you go down there, you'll find an old two-story brick house between Gill's and the Franklin Trust. That still belongs to Jerry. The other two houses he sold, making about fifty per cent on what he paid for them.

Then, one day, he came into the office looking sick. He had met a friend, who had been down and out. The friend was selling mining stock, and Jerry, of course, had invested heavily.

"He's sick—he has to go West to live," Jerry explained. "I *couldn't* turn him down!"

We jeered at him. We advised him to use his stock certificates for wall paper; and then there was a report of a rich find of ore, and the stock jumped to a figure above what Jerry paid his friend. That would have happened for no one but Jerry; and his luck still held when he was invited to sell. He did it more from his liking of the soliciting broker than from self-interest, and sold just in time to avoid the slump that followed when the supposed bonanza petered out.

Then, because a friend of his was starting a bridge construction company, he put money into it; and now it is one of the most solid corporations in the country. But for a number of years Jerry's investment paid no dividends; and it was during that time, I think, that his biggest luck came to him.

He was dreamy—I'd noticed that; some of the bunch who envied his ability called him a half-wit—but he never gave me any trouble until he was betrayed by a colonial doorway. It was too much for him, and it beat him in a scoop.

I remember the whole thing clearly enough. A woman who had committed suicide in a spectacular, unusual way—as I recall, she hung herself with her own hair, which she had cut and braided into a rope—had left a letter for a hitherto much respected and decidedly conservative New York banker. Of course, it was meat for the newspapers, and I sent Jerry out for a sketch of the house, which was in an old section of the city.

He didn't get back for hours. In desperation I sent a less talented but thoroughly reliable youngster to get the necessary

sketch. He came back just in time to get it into the evening edition.

When Jerry came in, he carried under his arm a superb sketch of a colonial doorway.

"Isn't that a *dream*?" he said in a rapt, hushed voice.

What I said can't be published. I know I thundered out:

"Jeremy Cole, I'll give you just one more chance!"

Any one except Jerry would have had a few short minutes to reach the street, and no more than that; but that colonial doorway took him to Paris, where his natural bent had a chance to assert itself and to establish him.

The next day Holburn Grant dropped in my office. He was going to tramp through France and do a little writing to pay his way.

"Spires, and doorways, and such stuff," he explained, with a grin.

Then he saw Jeremy Cole's colonial doorway, which Jerry had left on the end of my desk the day before.

"Who did it?" he asked.

His interest gave me reason to accord Cole's work a little respect, for Grant deserved his high position as a critic. I told him the story.

"I wonder whether he'd be interested in going along with me and sketching?" Grant questioned.

That began the long and pleasant association which did so much for them both, and which took them both so quickly into great popularity.

II

THEIR association lasted until Grant died last year, and then it did seem, for once, as if Jerry's luck had deserted him. He had long since passed the point of having to work, but he had the habit of work, and it was the only thing that brought him pleasure. So I wondered about him, and I was glad when I heard that he had done some sketching in Spain, and was to write his own narrative. It seemed to me that he could write well, because the genius for *seeing*, which makes artists and authors, often makes one individual successful in both lines.

I was glad again when I heard that he was to come back to the United States to supervise the making of his book—a thing which, with publishers as they are to-day, testified to his power.

I looked forward to meeting him with great interest. It had been close to twenty years since we had met, and I wondered what two decades had done to him.

We met—by chance—at a Dutch Treat Club lunch.

"Hello, Binks!" he said.

I looked up to see the same boy, the same grin, the same stoop, and even, it seemed, the same, shabby-edged coat sleeves. I was tremendously glad to see him—every one always was—and we talked as we drank our coffee and smoked.

"Hear you're doing your own writing," I said, after we'd turned most of our tobacco to ashes. "How's it going?"

For the first time I found that Cole could look immature, for the serene detachment that made him a benign old man slipped from his face for a moment, and he was young and anxious.

"I really don't know," he said in an undertone.

"Got it finished, haven't you, Jerry?" I went on.

"Oh, yes," he answered. "It's *finished*."

"Publishers like it?"

"Oh, yes, they like it."

"Well, then!" I said, and laughed.

I saw that my laughing did not please him.

"Binks," he said—Heaven alone knows why I have been so long hailed by such an appellation, for my name is Watson—"Binks, I thought, as I saw you, that *you'd* understand."

"Understand what?" I asked, and I was a little nettled, as is a man whose sense of humor or quick comprehension has been questioned.

"Why, the thing that no one seems to see," said Jerry Cole. "For years I have worked toward perfection," he added slowly, as he stirred his ashes with a match stem. "I've struggled to put into my etchings what is true—in sunlight, form, shadow, and *nothing more than that*. I have—with—with"—he stammered, I think, because he was speaking of what was, at that time, his only love—"I have, with pain that no one knows, killed my low leaning toward the 'pretty.' I have sweated over my work to make it what it is; and—"

He stopped, frankly unable to go on.

"Well?" I prompted.

"And now," he said, his lean cheeks hot, his eyes smoldering, "I have betrayed my

work by giving to it a text that is not worthy of a soap advertisement. I have been forced to understanding my failure by hearing such a man as Dwight"—Dwight was his publisher—"say, 'Knock together something that will go below your prints suitably. You'll know the proportion you'll want given to print, and any little descriptive word will go.'" Cole sat back in his chair after his quotation. "Isn't that *hell?*" he concluded.

"Well, I don't know about that," I murmured evasively.

I could see his point, but whether to admit it or not I could not decide. I didn't know how to help him.

"And think," Cole went on, "of my criminal insolence! I, who have worked half a lifetime to make myself fit to be called an artist—I do such a thing as that! I, who have railed against the fact that this generation does not know what the word 'apprenticeship' means—I lunge into writing without a thought!"

"When is it coming out?" I asked.

"In the autumn," he replied, with an ironic laugh.

But it didn't come out. It never came out. Luck again stepped in. Jerry Cole himself told me enough of the story to let me picture it.

He said that it was a warm June day when his publisher's secretary telephoned him, asking whether he had a second copy of his manuscript. He had not, and after his answer he said he felt a hole at the other end of the wire—a blank, the sort of emptiness that testifies to shock.

"But why—" he began.

"Mr. Dwight will probably telephone you later himself, Mr. Cole," interrupted Miss Morris, the secretary, and she hung up most precipitately.

But Dwight didn't telephone. He betook himself and all his immaculate tailoring and his boutonniere and his Malacca stick to Cole's house—where Jerry's mother had lived during the first years of her married life.

The publisher would not sit down. Instead, he stood at the doorway, stiff and white, while he made his confession.

"The manuscript," he said, "is gone. I am responsible, for I let it go out of the office at the request of a copy reader who was laid up with a sprained ankle." The assured Dwight had to stop and swallow before he could go on. "She read manu-

scripts before they went to the printers," he went on, "and—and—"

"Well?" Cole prompted.

"It is another case of Carlyle's 'French Revolution,'" said Dwight, his voice hoarse. "The woman who comes in to clean for Miss Janice accidentally destroyed your manuscript."

That was about all, save the fact that Mr. Dwight assured Mr. Cole that Miss Janice had been dismissed from the editorial staff. That troubled Cole. He thought she should be rewarded for what she had done; but, instead of being rewarded, she was probably hunting a job. He decided he would see that she got a job.

III

He found her in a room that was evidently a bedroom by night and a kitchen and a living room by day. She grew white as he came across the room to her—Jerry told me of this himself—and for a moment she could not speak.

"Sit down—if you will," she said finally, with gasps and a deep-drawn breath or two between her words.

Jerry also told me that he had never *felt* a woman's beauty until that moment. He had enjoyed a good slant of eyes, a sway of hip, a rise of breast, an oval face, or a throat that led up and down, as it should. He had often noticed these feminine points, as he noticed the colonial doorway that started him to France; but he said he had never felt loveliness until that day when he faced Anne Janice.

"Then—"

But he couldn't go on—he couldn't explain.

"She's *wonderful!*" was all he could say.

He told her, haltingly, because he was suffering an onslaught of emotion which was new to him and vastly unsettling, that it didn't matter; but he didn't tell her quite all the truth until she told her truth.

"It does matter," she said. "It matters horribly, and it is more my fault than Mr. Dwight's. I—I had the presumption to—to pass judgment upon your manuscript. I—I said, as I read it, 'This is *truck!*' Mrs. O'Higgins, who cleans my rooms, heard me, and thought I meant that it was waste paper."

She stopped abruptly, and dropped her face to her hands. Cole said he put his hand on her shoulder because she cried so hard, and because he was so grateful. She

put her hand up and clung to his. Then she turned her face and kissed his hand. I presume he seemed to her to be a middle-aged and rather gawky man, who was kinder than any of her dreams of a kind God. I imagine, too, that when she looked up, she changed her mind, for I know she looked up to meet the eyes of a hungry youngster deep in love.

Cole stayed with her that day for two hours. He sat by the couch to which her sprained ankle chained her, patting her hand—which, he said, did not seem strange at the time to either of them—and telling her about the book on Spain. He told her how he had gone into it without thought, and then had realized that he had brutally assaulted the art he knew and loved by tying it to an art in which he was not even a novice. She understood his point—he said she was the first person who had really understood—but she could not quite believe him.

"You are not being—kind?" she asked. "This is *true*?"

"As true as the fact that I love you," he replied.

I can see it and hear it—his stammer; his candid eyes that one had to believe; her sudden flush, followed by pallor; his long hands, covering her hand, patting it; his words—

"If you'll give me time, I'll—I'll *show* you!"

I can see his leaving—his reaching the door and going back to stand by her a second more.

"I'm coming to-morrow, *early*!"

I know just how he said that, and how his voice shook.

There is an adage about measles and love, and it is true; but love can twist youth, too. I never saw a woman more wholly swept by love, and given up to love, than was Anne Janice.

He gave her time. He took almost a week to persuade her. When I met him next, he was married. He had lost his calm detachment, and his eyes were young. He was also more alert than he had ever been. He said that stepping away from the nightmare that the lost manuscript had been to him had made a new man of him. That, probably, and something else. Even a bachelor of my sedate type knows that love has its place.

"Come see me," he said, as we parted. "But you won't," he added. "No one sees any one but Anne, if she is in the room—she is so beautiful!"

At first, I found her rather plain. Indeed, she was plain until she looked at Cole. Then I knew that the shape of a nose makes little difference. It may be a bit uptilted and not mar harmony or perfection. It is the eyes that count to a man, and what is behind them, and what shines through them.

Jeremy Cole tells me that she has made his long wait worth while, and has given full return for his bachelor apprenticeship. Well, I believe him. I had to believe him. Any one would who, seeing at all, sees them together.

THE SIREN

Oh, the sweet, green earth is Penelope,
But the sea is Circe! She weaves a snare,
She draws me away from the hearthfire there,
And she lays a spell on the heart of me!

Though Circe is fickle and false, I know,
And Penelope patient and true and sweet
To await the return of my roving feet,
Yet when Circe calls, I must rise and go!

Though Penelope weep, I must wander free,
I must steel my heart to the grief of her;
For when Circe calls me, my pulses stir,
I must go when I hear the siren sea!

I must feel her kiss, I must breathe her breath,
Though her breath destroy, though her kiss be death!

Roselle Mercier Montgomery

David Rudd

A ROMANCE OF OLD ST. LOUIS AND THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

By Ralph E. Mooney

DAVID RUDD is a veritable son of the Mississippi—an orphan waif picked up and adopted by Zebulon Starr, whose home is a trading scow on the river. When Starr dies, the lad is befriended by an old French gentleman of St. Louis, Dr. Trudeau, whom David has rescued from footpads on the levee. The doctor gives him a home ashore, and an education.

Being a personable young fellow, David is introduced to the society of St. Louis, the metropolis of the great Mississippi Valley. He falls in love with Sally Anne Fitzwilliam, a daughter of a "county family" settled just outside the city; and this brings him into sharp rivalry with John-son Hicks, whose father, James Hicks, is Dr. Trudeau's close friend. A duel is arranged between the two young men, but is interrupted by Trudeau and the elder Hicks.

The doctor now decides that his protégé shall go back to the river, and gets him a berth as "cub pilot" on a passenger steamer. He makes his mark as a skillful and daring pilot, and is so engrossed in his work on the river that he neglects writing to Sally Anne, with the result that they become estranged. David finds a stronger attraction in Alice Burton, whose father, Captain Burton, is a steamboat owner of New Orleans. The captain consents to his daughter's engagement, but insists that David must own a boat before he marries Alice. He tells David of a steamer, the Henry Chouteau, whose owner, a planter named Lavigne, would sell her cheap; but Rudd lacks the necessary money.

The matter comes to a head when Marshall Keyes, one of David's boyhood associates in St. Louis, loses twenty thousand dollars of his father's money to a gambler, Sam Cushing, on the boat of which David is pilot. David induces Cushing to lend him the money to buy the Chouteau. He hopes—with the aid of another boyhood friend, Ned Lane, as his business manager—to earn enough money to repay the gambler's loan and to save Keyes from disgrace.

XV

"I DON'T see how this betters my position," complained Marshall Keyes, when David returned to his friends. "You didn't get the money back—you only borrowed it. I must go on home and face my father without his twenty thousand dollars!"

David shook his head.

"No," he explained, "you aren't to go to St. Louis now. You must get off at Memphis, or Hickman, and take the first boat back to New Orleans. Then write and tell your father that the payment has been delayed. Later, if necessary, you can think up other excuses—a slight illness, or a delay on some boat for repairs. All I ask is that you will gain all the time you can. I'll guarantee to replace the money you lost, and to pay Cushing as well."

"Why pay Cushing? Ned says his game is crooked."

"This is a loan," answered David. "I've promised to meet it. Anyhow, if I

didn't pay him, he'd talk, and your father would be sure to hear what happened."

"Another thing, Marshall," put in Ned Lane. "Just remember that you're in a mighty bad fix now, and that David's scheme offers a way to get you absolutely clear. If it wasn't for this chance, you'd have nothing to face but ruin. You'd have to leave St. Louis and go West, and the story might even follow you there."

At St. Louis, David gave up his position as pilot on the Clark boat, and within a few hours of landing he was ready to sail as a passenger on another packet bound for New Orleans. He did not even have time to visit Dr. Trudeau, but he sent a note from the levee, explaining some part of what he had in hand.

While his packet made ready to leave, he was eager and restless—now ecstatic over visions of success, now feverish with doubt. If he could only make a go of his venture, he would save Marshall, and would come out of it owning a steamboat. Then,

before long, Alice would be traveling with him, making a honeymoon trip on his own boat. Captain Burton would beam upon him as a capable son-in-law.

Finding the view of the St. Louis levee tedious, he went to the rear of the Texas, where he stood for a long while, looking down river. At last they got under way.

The trip was commendably quick. On the fourth day he was in the lower river, and was able to change to the venerable Belle Key, the pride of the Louisiana bayous. The Belle Key was less soothing to the nerves of a young man in a hurry. She ambled back and forth through the delta, seeming wholly unaware of the importance of David's mission; but eventually she dropped her gangplank on the bank of Bayou La Fourche, and he went ashore on the plantation of Marcel Lavigne, Creole sugar planter.

A fourteen-year-old black boy seized his carpetbag and took him officiously to the "big house." A stunning mulatto woman snatched the bag, boxed the boy's ears, and informed David that a room was ready. He was expected to spend the night, she told him, and *madame* would see him in an hour or so.

Finally, before he had more than turned around in the room, Marcel Lavigne appeared, not in the least disturbed by the fact that David was a stranger, and wholly unexpected. The visitor was requested to make himself comfortable, and to call Gaston if he needed anything—at which Gaston shuffled into the doorway and bowed a woolly head.

David was forced to spend three languid days in the big white house. The planter was a delightful host, but a very deliberate business man, and it was long before David could even open the subject. Finally, however, Lavigne agreed to sell the Chouteau at fifteen thousand dollars. Then, as the boat was part of an estate, it was necessary to ride twenty miles to the county seat, to persuade a somnolent probate judge to hold court and issue an order permitting the sale, and, lastly, to scour two counties to obtain the signatures of interested relatives on quit-claim deeds.

"My law!" exclaimed the planter, when David reappeared after a week, with the papers he had accumulated. "You river-men have the mos' terrible impatience!"

"Well, sir, I know I'm hasty, but I want to get a few sugar cargoes, if I can."

"H-m! Where is my book of law forms? We will execute the bill of sale."

An hour later David was in possession of the Henry Chouteau, a two-hundred-ton steamer in battered and run-down condition, but with several years' wear in her. He wanted to go on board the deserted vessel at once, but the planter insisted upon his coming to dinner.

This meal was served at noon, of course. It was long and ceremonious, by way of celebrating the sale, and the planter's immediate family were present *en masse*. His wife, who had changed from a beautiful Creole to a distinctly stout French matron, panted and puffed and beamed upon David, who sat at her right. Shy black eyes and timid smiles came from a flock of progeny. Bits of French, Spanish, and English filled the air. Now *madame* would tell a solemn negro butler to "serve *monsieur* with the duck." A moment later she could call to a beaming second man:

"*Portez-nous le vin, vite!*"

After dinner David and the planter sipped cordials in the humid coolness of the deep porch. Insects buzzed about, unnoticed by the planter, and half a dozen dogs slept at their feet. Some three hundred yards away lay the negro quarters, agleam with whitewash, a small town of them. Here and there on the landscape drainage ditches, brim full of flowing water, sparkled with all the gayety of clear brooks. Not that David had seen many clear brooks. He was accustomed to the soil bearing fluids of the Mississippi Valley, and took it for granted that all natural waters were tawny in color.

The planter assumed a reflective attitude, and remained quiet for nearly half an hour. David believed him to be asleep, but this was not so.

"I have been thinking," said his host, opening his eyes and turning his head slightly.

"Yes?"

"You want the sugar. Mine, he is mostly packed, even now. We shall load him. I will give you your first cargo as owner of the Henry Chouteau!"

David offered surprised thanks, but protested that he had no crew.

"I will lend you the crew. I have plenty of hands. I will give you your fireman on contract, and you shall pay me their wage, as is the custom. I will lend a force to load the sugar, and when you get to New

Orleans you will be able to pick up a deck crew to unload it. I will write M. Bonneville, at the warehouse, to assist you, if necessary." Then the planter beamed happily. "I am a pretty good man to deal with, eh?"

"Indeed you are!" agreed David.

"Every one says so," went on the planter. "Every one says Marcel Lavigne is the perfect business man. You will take my sugar, then?"

"Gladly. I'll make the rate fifty cents cheaper."

"No, no!" objected Lavigne. "The rate shall be standard. I am only too glad to be sure of a boat at this time. I had even thought of manning the Chouteau myself, but that is nearly impossible, you will admit. My brother was the steamboat man of the family—I, the planter."

"You are generous—too generous," declared David.

"No, positively no—merely just."

David had written to New Orleans to locate an engineer and a mate of whose ability he was certain. They turned up on the day following, and set to work getting the Henry Chouteau in shape, with the help of Lavigne's negroes.

The mate worked a large gang, cleaning up and loading. The engineer, a Scotsman of thirty-five years, who had worked with steam engines in English mines and on river craft since his seventeenth year, set to at the engines. He was helped by two elderly negroes who had been trained as plantation blacksmiths and mechanics.

Within a week another engineer and two pilots were on hand, and Lavigne's sugar was loaded. Two of the Chouteau's four boilers had been scaled, and the cylinders had been properly packed. Under half power David took his boat to New Orleans. There, when her cargo was disposed of, he gave her all essential repairs and took on a proper crew. Marshall Keyes was retrieved from fretful idleness and made clerk.

Before the work was done, David received a letter from Lavigne stating that two neighbors had shipments ready, and would hold them for David, if he would promise to carry them down river. The young owner sent the required promise by messenger, and followed with the Henry Chouteau two days later.

The race against time was fairly on. David must make the boat earn enough to

replace Marshall Keyes's losses, and to clear his own debt, before Sam Cushing could grow impatient, and before the elder Keyes could become suspicious and precipitate an investigation into his son's affairs.

A month, at most, was left to him. The odds were sufficient to daunt an older man, even in boom times, but David put himself into the contest with enthusiasm. He drove craft and crew to the limit of endurance, often going forty-eight hours without sleep, and traveling with sugar hogsheads piled to the level of the boiler deck railings.

It was sugar that made the undertaking possible. He had depended upon the seasonal movement, and he had calculated wisely.

In the clerk's office Marshall kept a tally sheet of the profits, and fretted between entries until he was haggard. Week by week the figure crept up, to reach twenty thousand dollars at last, and then to fall back as supply bills were met and a pay roll settled.

Then came three short trips to near-by points along the bayous, each with the hold and deck loaded to capacity, and success was assured. It was made doubly certain when, on the last day of the month of grace, a firm of steamboat agents, with whom David had made connection, succeeded in chartering the Henry Chouteau to a band of Bavarian immigrants, religious enthusiasts, who wished to be transported to the site of a coöperative colony in Arkansas.

The negotiations for the trip were completed in early morning, and the Bavarians went on board at once. While the deck hands were loading their baggage and supplies, David hurried to the Burton home, and found Alice and her father together. Breathlessly he told them the state of affairs. Alice wriggled with delight, and promised to decide upon the date of the wedding before he returned to New Orleans. Captain Burton beamed upon him as cordially as he could have hoped; after which David hurried back to the levee.

Shortly afterward the Henry Chouteau backed into mid stream to the tune of Lutheran hymns of thanksgiving. Marshall Keyes, on the hurricane deck, removed his hat with an air of reverence while the singing lasted. Specie to the amount of twenty thousand dollars lay in his valise

below, and there were no gamblers aboard. Already relief was etching out the lines of worry on his face.

David, at the guard rail, looked astern, where the tall figure of Sam Cushing could be seen passing over the levee. Cushing had been paid in full, and the owner of the Henry Chouteau might look any man in the face. David clenched his fists in a burst of joyous excitement.

When they were under way, he turned to Marshall.

"I can't understand how we won through so rapidly," he said. "Why, it's a few days less than two months since the night you had your trouble, and we've paid both debts!"

"I've been thinking of that, Davy," said Marshall. "Since I'm going to leave you soon, I'm going to give you a piece of advice. Don't let any of the regular steamboat clerks keep your books. Get a new, green boy from ashore, and train him to keep books, so that you can follow what he's doing. I'll show you how to do it, if you wish."

David laughed. How true this was to human nature! Every man believed his work paramount. Here was Marshall claiming that their success was due wholly to his bookkeeping.

"I think the fact that we had to do it was probably what made us carry it through," said David. "Necessity is the mother of more than invention."

"Undoubtedly," Marshall replied seriously. "We wouldn't have tried it at all, if it hadn't been for necessity; but, all the same, the reason we made our pile so soon was because I was keeping accounts and wasn't fooling myself or you. Steamboat bookkeeping is a stock joke among business men in the cities, David. That's a fact. They all laugh about it. You even see editorials in the papers making fun of it. You know that's true, because you've seen them."

"You mean that the clerks are always dishonest?"

"Oh, not altogether—that is, they wouldn't call it dishonesty; but, if you'll notice, it's usually clerks that retire from the river to live easy somewhere. It's rarely captains or pilots, or even owners. Bookkeeping is the reason. Don't forget that, Davy!"

Here David recalled that old Captain Tyce, one of the most successful men on

the river, was a former clerk, and thoroughly familiar with steamboat office methods.

"By thunder!" he ejaculated. "I certainly won't forget it. I remember that the old fellow who brought me up was always saying, 'You got to know your figures, Davy. Figures is the most important thing in life.' I'm beginning to see that he was right."

"He was, Davy—dead right. You go by that, and you'll make a fortune on the river."

XVI

AFTER landing the Bavarians David ran on to St. Louis, picking up a scanty cargo on the way, for he was anxious to establish himself in the St. Louis-New Orleans trade, and equally anxious to show the Henry Chouteau to Dr. Trudeau. He tied up at the levee near the foot of Wash Street.

Before he could go ashore, he found himself holding an impromptu reception on the hurricane deck. He was popular on the river, and every pilot and captain who happened to be on the levee came to congratulate him on acquiring a boat of his own. They swarmed about him for an hour or more, and intimate friends created a great deal of laughter by teasing him about the small size of the Chouteau. Niles, his instructor in river craft, scored a particular hit by cautioning every one not to go near the rails, for fear she might tip over.

Dr. Trudeau, who had followed the reports of David's voyage upstream in the *Missouri Republican*, was among the first on board. As he was bubbling with enthusiasm, he took the teasing to heart.

"But she is a fine boat, David!" he would proclaim, after each fresh sally. "She is among the most beautiful I have ever seen!"

Presently the doctor fell in with McKenzie, the Scotch engineer. McKenzie had wheedled considerably more money from David than the young owner should have allowed, and, in addition, had worked the greater part of every day at his forge in the engine room. The result was new crossheads and slides, new rings for the pistons, and many other things. These had reduced vibration to a minimum, and had vastly increased both the power of the boat and McKenzie's pride in his engines, which was always overwhelming. Consequently, the engineer was an ideal companion for the doctor.

Trudeau, who had been sickened by a Parthian shot from Niles, which compared the boat to a canoe, and suggested that David might paddle her himself when going downstream, and so save fuel, listened carefully to McKenzie's catalogue of the virtues of the machinery, and was immensely heartened by it. Before long the two drew apart and made their way to the engine room, to admire to their heart's content and to be quit of disturbing comment.

When Dr. Trudeau learned of the incentive for David's progress, and was informed that the young man's wedding with Alice Burton would be in order soon, his excitement and pride were redoubled. He had been talking of making a voyage with David. Now he insisted that he must go to New Orleans at once, and see the young lady and her father.

David agreed to this joyfully. Accordingly, as soon as he had made connections with a firm of agents in St. Louis, and had won the promise of a sufficient amount of freight, he set a sailing day, and went, with Dr. Trudeau at his side, to the office of the *Republican*, to order the insertion of an advertisement in the "lower river" column of sailing announcements.

After David's death, members of the family found several copies of the huge old journal—its pages were approximately a yard long and thirty inches wide—carefully laid away in his trunk. In each, of course, was half an inch of print, alongside a little black picture of a steamboat, proclaiming the first official sailing of the Henry Chouteau. It was brief, like a classified advertisement of later years, and as dignified as a professional card. In the same column were the names of twoscore other steamboats, long since gone to ashes or wrecked by some forgotten snag or reef.

On the night before the Chouteau sailed, Marshall Keyes invited David to a dance given by a relative. When he entered the ballroom, he saw Sally Anne for the only time during his visit. He found her, as Ned Lane had hinted, surrounded by a few of the beaus of his own earlier day and by a large number of younger men, who looked as if they might be students in academy or college.

The meeting was pleasant, but was on the terms of mischievous intimacy with which their acquaintance had begun. The greater sentiment that had existed for a time seemed definitely to have died. Sally

Anne congratulated David on achieving ownership, and teased him a little, as always. When the music began, David asked her to dance, and she responded in the affirmative, but one of the younger men reminded her that the number was already promised.

She whirled away, smiling brightly over her partner's shoulder, and that was the last David saw of her at close range. He could get no other dances with her, and most of the time the press about her was so close that he could not even approach her. She was full of gayety, and he finally left the party with a warm feeling of pleasure in her happiness. He did not develop the thought, but he realized that somehow it would have hurt if he had found that she still took their affair seriously.

"She's a mighty fine girl—a wonderful girl!" he muttered indulgently, as he went to bed in his old room at Dr. Trudeau's.

The sailing, next day, was delayed. Several tons of freight were added to the Chouteau's manifest at the last minute, and, as David was in no position to refuse cargo, she was held at the levee. While he, David, was standing near the gangplank, watching the loading, Ned Lane came up. Ned's boat had arrived in port the day before, and he was free of work for the time being.

"I see you made it go," he said, as he pressed David's hand.

David began to tell of his adventures in Louisiana, while Ned listened eagerly. He chuckled when he was informed of the actions of Lavigne, the planter.

"That's the way with those fellows!" he commented. "Win their liking, and they will do anything under heaven for you!"

David went on, giving details of his trips through the bayous. As their interest in the subject was vital, they failed to notice the approach of another young man, who came up and stood within listening distance and remained, frowning at them, for some time. Finally the newcomer interrupted David's recital.

"That's all very well, Rudd!" he sneered. "You may brag about it to Lane as much as you've a mind to, but I've heard the truth about you, and I intend to see that it is spread along the river. You bought this boat with what amounted to stolen money, and I notice you don't boast of that!"

It was Johnson Hicks. As he talked, he worked himself into one of his frenzies.

"Stolen money!" he went on, while the young men stared at him. "It belonged to Marshall Keyes's father, and Keyes lost it gambling. You got it back from the gambler and kept it to use yourself. I know all about it!"

David shrugged his shoulders and turned away from Hicks. Ned Lane uttered a grunt of disgust.

"What were you saying, Davy?" he asked.

Hicks was not to be silenced.

"I'll tell you another thing," he cried. "You've been paying attention to a young lady in New Orleans whom you had no right to approach with such a family record as you have. I'm going to see that she knows of this—she and her father. You may win applause here, where you're a favorite, but I'll guarantee Captain Burton won't be pleased with the story!"

The words came in a torrent. As David grasped their import, he whirled and dashed at Hicks with doubled fists. Hicks dodged with a quick movement and ran up the levee. David made no effort to pursue him, and he stopped running as soon as he reached level ground.

"Thank God, I'll be in New Orleans before you!" shouted Hicks. "I'll be in time to save her!"

He disappeared, walking hastily. David eyed Ned with a frown.

"He's on the Tigress, isn't he, under Wint Davis?"

Lane nodded in the affirmative.

"Yes, and she sails at five, too."

David frowned. The Tigress was a fast boat. Though not the speediest on the river, she was rated as much faster than the Chouteau. Furthermore, she was to sail at five, while David would be lucky to get under way by ten o'clock, at the rate things were going. If Hicks wanted to spread a story about him in New Orleans, he would have plenty of opportunity to do so before Rudd was on hand to answer it.

"Where in the world did he find out?" ruminated the young owner. "Oh, I suppose it was the gamblers. They must have talked a little."

"Of course," agreed Lane. "I've been afraid of that. Old Cushing would never breathe a word when he's sober, but—he's only sober when he's working."

"That other matter Hicks mentioned," pondered David. "How on earth did he find out about that? How did he know I

was calling upon any one in New Orleans, much less who she was?"

"H-m!" grunted Lane. "Let's see. He mentioned Captain Burton. Oh, great Scott! Is Alice Burton the girl you've been interested in down there?"

David had been reserved in supplying information about his visits ashore in New Orleans, and Ned, of course, had respected his silence, for it was a quality which David had learned from Ned himself.

David replied to Ned in the affirmative. Lane burst into laughter.

"That is ridiculous," he said. "Hicks has been making an idiot of himself over her ever since she visited St. Louis last year. I've heard that he's gone to old Captain Burton with everything from petitions to challenges, and that Burton has ordered him away half a dozen times; but she remains Hicks's first choice. Davy, you've outrivalled him twice in less than five years!"

XVII

"So Johnson and I are rivals again," said David dreamily, "and he plans to make trouble for me down below!"

He paused for a moment, squinting at the line of steamboats downstream. He seemed to find a smokestack that was out of perpendicular, or to note a peculiarity of decoration.

"I'll be damned if I let him do it!" he declared.

"Of course not," approved Lane; "but what can you do to prevent him?"

"I'll get to New Orleans first," decided David, "and—well, Ned, I believe I can fix things so that he will never dare talk about Miss Burton—or me!"

Ned Lane's eyes went wide.

"You mean you'll race the Tigress downstream in low water?"

"I must."

Ned Lane whistled. David moved away.

"You can help me, Ned," he said. "Go down by the courthouse and along the river front, and spread the word that I want to double my loading crew at once, will you?"

"I'm off!" replied Ned, without hesitation. "I wish you luck, Davy!"

David went on board and spoke to the first mate, who was directing the loading.

"I want to beat the Tigress to New Orleans," he stated. "I've got to do it. They think they'll have several hours' start of

me, but I'm going to get extra hands so that you can hurry the loading."

The mate, who was six feet of Illinois countryman, remained in a listening attitude for perhaps half a minute. A wide and seraphic grin spread over his countenance. It disappeared as the man started into life and uttered a galvanic stream of profanity. The deck hands speeded up a notch.

David went back past the boilers and found McKenzie in the engine room. The Scotsman's eyes glittered as he received David's instructions, and he patted a cylinder with grave confidence.

"Now, sir, now ye'll see that the money didna go to waste! Ye'll be delightit, captain—delightit. McKenzie's engines will do all that the frame can stand!"

Before long the neighborhood of the Henry Chouteau was like bedlam. Roustabouts were flocking down the levee to earn a few dollars in getting the cargo aboard, and, as they came up, the mates set them moving in steady procession, up one gangplank and down the other. Colored hands were roaring songs, while Irishmen vied with one another in feats of strength, uttering derisive yells with each new display of prowess. The freight on the bank vanished as if by magic, and, as the last crates went on board, deck hands waited up the levee to cast off the headlines.

Ned Lane, who had returned to the scene of action, undertook to pay off the extra hands. The last David saw of him, he stood on the levee surrounded by a pawing mob of blacks and whites. Before this, however, Ned called a message to the hurricane deck.

"I found out something, Davy," he told his friend. "Johnson Hicks has bought an interest in the Tigress. Old Ladew, his partner, is in the hospital, so Johnson has full charge of her trip. He heard of your preparations, the Tigress people said, and they have instructions to get to New Orleans ahead of you if they have to burn the guard rails. They have tied a broom on the pilot house."

David leaned over the rail and nodded in a matter-of-fact way.

"Glad to hear it," he said. "I aim to give them a look at my broom, before we're through!"

The Henry Chouteau backed out immediately. As her bow swung downstream,

the steam began to make sharp reports in the escape pipes. There was a wild suggestion of power and speed in the sound. The off-watch pilot, the mate, Dr. Trudeau, and the half dozen passengers began to pace the hurricane deck nervously. They were racing the Tigress to New Orleans. It was impossible to sit quiet, knowing that.

A long steamboat race was an event of importance to the Mississippi Valley. Sporting contests were few in that place and time, and the American's growing interest in sport centered, along the great river, upon those staged by steamboats. Conversation in the river towns was largely devoted to comparisons of craft that were notorious rivals. Men bragged of the Eclipse and the A. L. Shotwell as New Yorkers of another generation bragged of Christy Mathewson. Yet real races over long distances, such as this, were comparatively rare, for they interfered with business. That between the Robert E. Lee and the Natchez, in 1870, was practically the only matched race in the history of the Mississippi.

Brief trials of speed were common—races where the object was to be first at a given landing, and to secure whatever freight might be waiting there. A boat would sight a rival a few miles from an important town, and would crack on steam at once. If she succeeded in passing the other, she would display a broom on her pilot house.

This was a gesture of defiance. The rival would throw fuel on her fires and open the forced draft. It might not be true that a negro would be ordered to sit on the safety valve, but the valve would certainly be jammed for a time, to prevent blowing off. If these measures were effective, and the boat won back the lead, she in her turn would display a broom. Some boats carried a broom perpetually, and so issued a challenge to all craft on the river, but they were supposed, in honor, not to do this if they had ever been beaten.

This, however, was no mere "brush for the broom." It was to be a twelve-hundred-mile struggle, wherein a daring newcomer was challenging the known and respected Tigress. News of it would spread rapidly. In St. Louis, every one connected with the steamboat trade would watch for reports from lower river towns. At lower river towns, young men would follow the

progress of the boats, and would break a leg to be on the bank when one or other of them was due to pass. The winner would be received in New Orleans with much acclaim.

Afterward, the whole romantic story would spread from St. Paul to the Gulf of Mexico, and would penetrate fifty or a hundred miles inland, to furnish material for fireside discussion for a year or more. The valley would gloat over the details of rivalry in love culminating in a steamboat race—a race for honor, too. Those who rode on the Chouteau were making river history, and were well aware of it.

Hence the excitement on the hurricane deck, although every one knew that there could be no decision for several days, and that only singular good fortune could bring them within sight of the Tigress in less than forty-eight hours. The Tigress must have a handicap of forty or fifty miles, and she was a fast boat.

In the spring it would have been impossible to overcome such a lead, but this would not be wholly a race of speed. Skill and nerve were to be the greatest factors. Victory would come to the captain who would take the most risks, because of the low stage of the river. The Henry Chouteau was of lighter draft than the Tigress, and David counted upon being able to crowd her through the shoal places above Memphis at double the speed the rival pilots could use.

When a glance at the bank revealed him opposite Rattlesnake Spring, twenty-five miles out, a little more than an hour after leaving St. Louis, he indulged in a chuckle of confidence. Thanks to the presence of McKenzie in the engine room, the Chouteau was about to cause rivermen to form a new estimate of her speed. With the force of the current to aid her, she was doing a little better than twenty-two miles an hour. This would put her on an even basis with most of the craft on the river, the Tigress being no exception. Her run to New Orleans would equal that of a Clark boat, in spite of the delays that would take place about every four hours for the loading of wood to fire the engines.

Even if David lost the race, it was possible for him to defeat Johnson Hicks, for his enemy could do little to hurt him with only a few hours at his disposal. Johnson had counted upon a walk-over, with a day or more in port before the Chouteau ar-

rived from a normal run. He had committed a great error in telling David his plans.

The group upon the hurricane deck enjoyed the thrill of what was then "railroad speed." Few railroads, indeed, were able to do anything like it. Dr. Trudeau, who had not been upon the river for many years, was vastly excited. When he found David preoccupied with the supervision of the boat, he descended to the engine room and talked with McKenzie, who provided satisfactory entertainment by praising boat and engines with considerable duplication of material, but with pleasing earnestness.

The doctor did not retire until they had passed the town of Wittenburg, after midnight, and he was up and on deck again shortly after daybreak, stalking here and there with his cane. Occasionally he would peer over the side at the foaming water, to regard it for a time and then straighten, shaking his head with awe.

The Henry Chouteau passed Cape Girardeau early in the forenoon, and Cairo in the late afternoon. There David received information that the Tigress had left a little less than two hours before; but this report must have been in error, for at Memphis, where he took wood during the second night, he found that she was less than an hour ahead. All of the second period of daylight was spent in anticipation of catching sight of the Tigress, but nothing was seen of her. She had more water now, and was getting the full advantage of her larger engines.

Deep in the night, however—this was the third night of the race—David saw a flare of torches at the foot of a bend. It marked the spot where a steamboat was tied up to load wood. He watched the glow with a peculiar feeling of certainty. In a few moments his intuition was confirmed, for he made out the lines of the Tigress.

As he did so, his pilot sounded a triumphant blast of the whistle. The Chouteau swept past her motionless rival, while David looked over the rail, a hard little smile on his lips. The race was far from ended, but he had made up the greater part of the Tigress's handicap.

Of course, he could not keep the lead. In less than an hour the Chouteau was compelled to take wood, and the Tigress stormed past her landing place, coming in close enough for the crews to exchange taunts.

As daylight came, David pulled up in

sight of the rival boat, and all day they had it nip and tuck. Now one, now the other, carried the broom. David gained appreciably in shoal places, but the Tigress, time and again, got back all that she had lost. When they passed Baton Rouge, shortly after nightfall, they were running almost abreast. From the dark shore line, below the town, they could hear men shouting them on.

Daybreak found them at Plaquemine, a little more than a hundred miles from New Orleans, with the Tigress a mile in lead, but Donaldsonville, thirty-five miles farther, saw the Chouteau on her rival's quarter. David was jubilant. New Orleans was approximately seventy-five miles distant, and it was obvious that the boats would arrive at about the same time. Johnson Hicks was beaten!

He displayed no intention of giving up, however. It was impossible to tell what desperate idea he had in mind, but, whatever it was, he did not abandon it. The Tigress began to make frantic exertions to outpace the Chouteau. David could see half a dozen men in her pilot house, and there was feverish activity on her main deck.

Soon a rim of gold flame began to show above her smokestacks. David knew that down below they were flinging carefully kept reserves of resinous wood into the furnaces, and perhaps barrels of fat and tallow as well. He nodded to the pilot, and heard that excited gentleman shout through the speaking tube to the engine room. Before long fire was showing at the lip of his own stacks.

The Tigress drew ahead slightly, and seemed likely to win the race to the next crossing, where the channel narrowed. If she entered the bad water first, David would be compelled to check his boat until the Tigress was out of the way. He nodded to the pilot again. Another order—more pressure below.

The explosions from the Chouteau's escape pipes now came like pistol shots. The texas roof, near the smokestacks, began to scorch from the heat, and a hand was ordered up to play on it with the deck hose.

The Chouteau moved up on the Tigress. The pilot, taking advantage of the end of a reef, where the current was running like a mill race, hurled the Chouteau inside the other craft and nosed into position for the crossing. The Tigress was compelled

to sheer off to avoid a collision. David heard a shout of fury from her hurricane deck and a wild jangling of bells in her engine room.

With her deck trembling, the Chouteau plunged into the long crossing. She gained a quarter of a mile, but in the next stretch of open water the Tigress came on furiously, and the lead was cut down, foot by foot.

Then, quite tamely, the race came to an end. When they were near the Bonnet Quarre Church landing, David looked rearward and saw the other boat slow down and make for the bank. A faint cloud of steam blowing from her boiler deck told a story that could not be doubted. In their straining, the engineers of the Tigress had blown out a cylinder head.

David sighed, and mentally blessed the competent McKenzie, who had brought his own engines through without damage. He left the guard rail and sat down on a chair, placed just forward of the texas, which he occupied by custom and by river tradition.

He found the sudden reaction from strain a curious sensation. In some ways it was like coming out of a daze. He recalled that he had been awake more than forty-eight hours, and realized that he was dully fatigued from head to foot. He found himself hungry, too.

He took a cigar from his mouth and stared at it with repugnance. It seemed he had been smoking steadily for hours on end. His throat was dry and reeking with tobacco.

After a moment he flung away the cigar, and, rising, nodded to the pilot, about to give an order. In the same breath he perceived that his order had been anticipated. The forced draft was off, and flame no longer showed above the smokestacks. The deck hose was being coiled in place. The Henry Chouteau was leisurely and contentedly churning her way to New Orleans, with the manner of a tired athlete who comes up to the finish line of a long course, and is grateful to find that no final spurt is required of him.

XVIII

Just above New Orleans the Chouteau was met by two boats whose captains had seized the opportunity to take aboard an excursion crowd and run up to view the finish of the race. They escorted the victor, with a liberal waste of steam and a

steady uproar, to a landing place which had already been selected. The levee, at this point, was black with people, and beyond it were little groups stationed here and there upon the taller buildings.

As David went ashore, he was received by a throng of acquaintances. Among the first to face him was Captain Burton. David contrived to flash a message to the captain, and, as soon as might be, took his arm and set off over the levee and down to the streets of New Orleans.

They walked toward Captain Burton's office, David talking rapidly, while the captain puffed at a cigar. Finally, as they came to the riverman's door, David concluded his exposition of the facts of the case with this appeal:

"I want to make it impossible for Hicks to say one word about it, sir!"

Captain Burton, removing his cigar from his mouth, replied:

"David, if Alice is willing, you have my permission."

David went straightway to the house that Burton had leased on Camp Street. Alice called down to him from the second floor balcony, which ran above the entryway, in the shadow of the wide eaves of the building.

"Did you win, Davy?" she asked.

"I did!" called David. "I want to see you right away!"

Alice guessed something of his purpose, and blushed faintly, but after a second a glorious smile came, and she nodded.

"I'll be down as soon as I change my dress," she said gayly.

A negro servant appeared and conducted David into a rather astonishing parlor. The house was old, and the walls of the room were decorated with landpaper, hung early in the century, when landscape panoramas were the passion of decorators. Before David's eyes, whichever way he turned, was a Chinese landscape filled with pig-tailed, fan bearing, tea drinking orientals, whose eyes were set at extremely oblique angles, and whose mustaches—when they wore mustaches—were very long and apparently braided.

David sat in a haircloth armchair, a specimen of the knobby and grooved sort of furniture which descended upon the land when Duncan Phyfe stopped making furniture and began producing it. He sat rather uncomfortably as he traced out the activities of various Chinamen. He might

have admired the marble top center table with its gilt-edged books and small trinkets, but in this breathing space he was more interested in the Chinamen.

His mind went back to the day on the scow with Zebulon Starr, and for a moment he seemed to hear Zebulon putting the question:

"And where do the Chinymen come from, David?"

A memory of Zebulon's thin face, and of the smile that set it all awry, came to him. Zebulon had a little the look of a Chinaman himself. At least, his eyebrows had slanted a trifle.

David was stricken with a sense of the passage of time. Gracious! Nearly ten years had passed since he had known the grief of losing Zebulon in that moist little town in Mississippi. Now he was past twenty-five and had become a steamboat owner. He was at the point of—

Zebulon and the Chinamen were forgotten as Alice swept into the room in a walking dress of silk, with a figure of large flowers—quite as startling as the Chinese landscapes, but not to David. David saw the basque, the widespread skirt held out by a petticoat of stiff millinet, the bell-shaped sleeves, the bertha caught with a cameo, and the small lace collar above it, as the height of loveliness—that is, if he saw them at all; for Alice Burton knew enough not to let men become conscious of her clothes.

Her manner, as she entered the room, was full of invitation. Her eyes and the dimples of her cheeks signaled it. David, even before she spoke, was caught up headlong in her attraction, and, seizing her in his arms, he kissed her.

She yielded prettily, but gently pushed him away at once as an elderly aunt rounded the door frame and came up to be introduced.

"And why did you want to see me right away?" asked Alice, as the aunt took up a position of chaperonage near the door.

David included the aunt in his reply:

"I have your father's permission to ask you to marry me at once."

"I guessed it!" said Alice, beaming. "Can you guess my answer?"

"I think so," said David, "unless you've changed—"

"Merciful Heavens!" ejaculated the aunt. "You don't mean to say he's talked to you about it before, Alice?"

Alice laughed, while her sparkling eyes sought David's. A little undulation of frank enticement traversed her body.

"Oh, yes, auntie!" she said. "Steam-boat men talk of nothing else!"

The aunt set her lips.

"Of course, you will take this under advisement and consider carefully—"

"I have considered, auntie."

David faced the perturbed chaperon.

"Yes, we have considered, and now—the actions of another man make it imperative that Miss Alice should come under my protection."

Involuntarily Alice clasped her hands in gratification. The moment she realized her action, she flung them apart with disturbed haste.

"That is Johnson Hicks?" she asked.

"Did you race with him on account of me, Davy?"

David nodded.

"Oh, how ridiculous!" she murmured.

"But you won, didn't you, Davy? You would—you always would!"

"But what do you mean?" asked the aunt. "Imperative? How, Mr. Rudd?"

"If Alice is willing, I want the wedding to take place to-day—within an hour, if possible."

The aunt uttered a shriek of dismay, Alice a cry of delight.

"Do you mean it, David? And father says we may?"

"Alice, it is impossible!" interrupted the aunt.

"No, auntie—I have my new gown, and the Ollivants have a bridal veil. We could be ready. Do you mean it, David?"

"I do," declared David.

Again her dimples and eyes sent her compelling signal. David kissed her. The aunt rose to her feet with a startled gasp.

"At any rate," she protested, "it will be impossible before five o'clock!"

"Five o'clock will do," agreed David, standing back from Alice and talking with blissful imbecility.

And at five o'clock it happened. That was before the day of announcement parties, engraved invitations with consequent wedding presents, and tailored bridal gowns—in the Mississippi Valley, at least. Weddings that were not solemnized under the ritual of the Catholic church were usually home affairs. They took place, as a rule, with a summoning of immediate relatives,

but with no previous formal notice, and little effort was made to announce them afterward.

Hence David's request was nowhere near so unusual or startling as it would be to-day; nor was it difficult for Alice to comply with it. The borrowing of a bridal veil was all that was necessary.

David summoned Dr. Woodbridge, who performed a great many of the marriage ceremonies for residents of the American section of New Orleans, and was escorted into that selfsame parlor, and among those selfsame Chinamen, by Dr. Trudeau. Besides the aunt and Captain Burton, there were only one or two cousins of the Burtons on hand.

After the ceremony, David took them all aboard the Henry Chouteau for a short run up the river. Dr. Trudeau and McKenzie and the mate had been busy since noon, making the boat ready to receive the captain's bride. The decks and woodwork had received a vigorous scrubbing, and David's quarters in the texas had been made beautiful with new pieces of hair-cloth and rosewood furniture and a blazing set of red cotton curtains.

Before getting under way, David sent a messenger to the agents for the Tigress, with a note addressed to Johnson Hicks, so that it would be presented to Hicks as soon as his steamer touched at the levee. The note was brief and to the point:

SIR:

As the young lady whose name you mentioned in conversation a day or so ago is now my wife, you will make further remarks concerning her affairs or mine at your peril.

DAVID RUDD.

Having dispatched this, David took his place on the hurricane deck, and, with Alice hovering about him, every dimple showing, got the Chouteau into mid river and consigned her to the pilot. A very long and ceremonious dinner followed in the main cabin, during which Dr. Trudeau proposed innumerable toasts and caused the party to consume enough claret and port to become hilarious.

David was pleased to note that the doctor seemed to have formed a favorable impression of Alice and her father. This could scarcely have been otherwise, however, for they had never shown to such good advantage as at that moment.

After dinner David led the way to the hurricane deck, to enjoy the sunset. He

came to a standstill near the big bell at the extreme forward edge of the deck. Alice squeezed her arm about his and rubbed her cheek on his shoulder, a vibrant, passionate bride of nineteen. He stroked her hair, but drew his hand away quickly as he heard the doctor coming up behind, giving Captain Burton a comprehensive catalogue of the merits of the Henry Chouteau.

Burton gently rallied the old Frenchman on his devotion to the craft. Dr. Trudeau seemed to feel the need of assistance.

"And the engines, my dear captain," he suggested shrewdly, "are supreme. Owing to the labors of M. McKenzie—but come, you must not leave the boat without observing them."

Captain Burton was dragged below.

Shortly afterward, as the Chouteau turned back from her brief run, near Carrolton, David saw a boat come limping around the nearest point. He uttered an exclamation in which triumph and ferocity were mingled. It was the Tigress, haltingly making her way to New Orleans after being delayed all day for repairs.

His exclamation was echoed in softer tones, but with the same fierce triumph, at his elbow. Glancing down, he found Alice staring up the river with shining eyes and quivering nostrils. David smiled at her proudly. She could triumph, too, and could hate a little. He liked her for it.

Alice looked up and perceived his smile. Flushing, she buried her face in the cloth of his coat.

"Stop looking at me!" she whispered.

XIX

"CAP'N, cap'n!" shrieked an African voice. "Cap'n, say g'-by t' me! Cap'n say by-by to little Johnny! Kiss me g'-by, cap'n daddy!"

David came to a standstill, while a black nurse rushed down the steps of his home and brought John Trudeau Rudd to him. The nurse gave all the appearance of reckless haste, fluttering and panting like a hen, but her arms curved about the infant tenderly, firm as the boughs of a tree.

John Trudeau Rudd, being a trifle less than six months of age, blinked and frowned at the brilliant summer sky, taking slight interest in the proceedings when David obediently kissed him. The nurse made up for his indifference, however.

"The idea of you goin' way and leavin' me, daddy, 'thout telling me by-by!" she

protested, acting as spokesman for John Trudeau. "What kine way to treat me is that, I like to know? Ain't I yo' son, Cap'n Rudd? Ain't I now? Wherefo' you go and fergit it?"

David somewhat constrainedly poked his forefinger at John Trudeau's passive little fists, and, failing to attract attention, chucked him under the chin. John Trudeau blinked and turned questioning eyes on the nurse.

"Yes," she answered, speaking now for herself, "that's him—that's yo' daddy, what was goin' way 'thout saying a word to us! That's the ve'y man! What you think of him, huh? What you think of such a man?"

A ripple of laughter from just above caused David to look up. Alice smiled at him from a window, her rosy countenance touched with lines of mirth.

"Now will you be good?" she demanded. "Take care how you treat Clementine's baby!"

"He betteh," seconded the nurse. "He betteh be careful how he act to Mammy Clementine's child. Jes' look at de lil rascal! Glory, mistis, but marstah cap'n jes' like all de men—won't pay no 'tention till dey begins to talk and walk and play aroun'!" She resumed her function of voice for the child. "Yes, suh, jes' you wait till I gets a little older—den you'll see. Den you'll be beggin' to play with me when it's mah bedtime. You'll want me aroun' always!"

Bestowing another kiss on the baby, and blowing one to his wife, David walked away. The home which he had taken for Alice, when the arrival of John Trudeau was near enough at hand to compel her to give up the privilege of traveling on the river at her husband's side, was on old Steamboat Row on Fifteenth Street, near Cass Avenue, in St. Louis.

Steamboat Row was a block of houses similar to the block in which James Hicks had lived. The entries gave direct to the street, and the fronts were flat and unadorned, but were hidden by the foliage of a line of poplars that followed the curb. It was an abiding place of fashion and display, and not a name plate in its length but bore a famous river name. Drew, Whiting, Bell, Burdeau, Ealer, Dewitt, Lambert, and a dozen other pilots lived there, together with a representation of engineers, mates, and masters.

As David made his way to the corner, he was joined by three or four men, who greeted him hilariously and walked with him. It was mid afternoon, and sailing time was at hand. They made their way to the route of an omnibus line. As their departure from home was nicely timed, they had only a few seconds to wait before they embarked for down town.

While his comrades jested heavily and gossiped, David kept cordial silence. A sense of pleasure and well-being so possessed him that he found it hard to talk. So much had happened, so much was happening, that he could scarcely realize it all, even when his tongue was still and he was but half aware of what went on about him.

Two years had passed since his wedding. They had left him as big as ever, and as hearty. They had brought him prosperity that was like a dream—evidenced, according to the fashion of the day, by a diamond stud glittering in his shirt front and another stone flashing up to him from the ring finger of his left hand.

He had done well with the Henry Chouteau, and before his first season had come to an end had gained a reputation for successful operation. Then Ned Lane had taken a master's license, and had proposed that they should go into partnership. The senior Lane, impressed by David's ability, seconded the proposal, and offered to finance the building of a new boat.

At the same time Marshall Keyes's father made a similar offer on behalf of Marshall. The elder Keyes knew of the gambling episode by now, but the knowledge only increased his admiration for David.

So two new eight-hundred-ton packets were built, the Celeste and the Henry Chouteau II. Ned took one and David the other, operating on alternate schedules between New Orleans and St. Louis. The old Henry Chouteau was turned over to another master and put into the upper river trade, where her light draft and small tonnage made her exceptionally valuable. Marshall Keyes stayed in the office in St. Louis, keeping the firm's books and, in modern parlance, "hustling freight."

Again success came. The Celeste and the Henry Chouteau II became such important units in the river trade that they were offered membership in a packet line composed of fourteen fast steamers, some owned individually, and some by corpora-

tions. The line was so organized that one of its member boats sailed from St. Louis and from New Orleans every day in the week, and its service was a sensation.

The three young men soon found themselves accumulating a good bank balance. They were planning to build more boats. The vision was before them of a great fleet which would eventually touch all points of the river system of the Middle West.

With all this, David had become something of a pet and an idol along the river. Stories of his career and his wedding—of his race with the Tigress, too, of course—had been magnified until they had attained a legendary quality. Passengers would seek out the Henry Chouteau II whenever possible, because it was something to be able to say that one had traveled with Captain Rudd. Idlers at landings were in the habit of calling good wishes to him whenever he appeared on deck.

His affection for Alice was notorious. It had never outgrown its honeymoon quality. Every one was aware of this fact, and the members of David's crew were given to making jokes about it. When the deck hands and firemen gathered about the capstan as the boat made or left a landing, to sing chancies and perform antics for bystanders and passengers, they never failed to quiz him, more or less subtly.

He recalled a verse which the privileged leader of the chorus, a giant fireman with a silvery tenor voice, had improvised on his last trip up the river. He had heard it shouted, line by line, as he stood on the hurricane deck, leaving New Orleans. First had come the voice of the tenor, as he stood on the capstan, swaying to mark the time:

"Oh, de cap'n stan' on de harrycun deck!"

Then had come the chorus, a musical uproar of African voices:

"Ah, ha-a-a-a!
Oh, ho-o-o-o!"

The tenor had gone on, alternating with the chorus:

"Dere's nobody like him, I expec'!"

"Ah, ha-a-a-a!
Oh, ho-o-o-o!"

"He's the hurriedest man in all yo' life,
Boun' up de river to see his wife!"

"Ha-ha-ha, oh, ho!"

The improvisation had ended in a roar of laughter. David had looked down on a

blur of flashing teeth and ecstatic, rolling eyes, laughing heartily himself. Recalling the scene and the emotions it inspired, he breathed a long sigh and shook his head indulgently.

The omnibus kept on at a walk. Clouds of dust rose from the unpaved roadway and drifted through the open windows. A blistering hot sun hung in a lightly clouded sky, and made the interior of the vehicle like an oven. Joking and gossiping died, and the passengers became stoical, looking straight ahead and appearing not to notice the discomforts of the journey.

Finally there came a breath of cool air and a faint smell of the river. They brightened noticeably. The omnibus turned along Fourth Street, and moved at a trot to a point near Olive, where the driver stopped without directions.

As the rivermen dismounted, a blustery and corpulent old captain swept them all before him.

"Well, boys, let's go down to the grocery and take on supplies before we sail. I'll treat!"

"Grocery," for some reason, was the slang of the day for a barroom. David went with them perfunctorily. He cared little for drinking, but it would have been bad form to refuse his neighbor's invitation. He contented himself with a glass of iced claret, and then bought cigars for all who desired them. Two or three men remained at the bar for further indulgence, but David, with an equal number, set out toward the levee.

As they descended the steeply sloping streets, they found that the heat had reduced business to a minimum. Clerks and employers, in their shirt sleeves, lounged in the doors of warehouses and wholesale establishments. It was not uncommon to see a bookkeeper dozing on his stool behind the narrow, small-paned windows. St. Louis stores had been built tall and deep, since the fire of 1849. The frontages, as a rule, were scanty, but every building was four to five stories in height, faced with brick or smooth stone laid in large blocks.

In one doorway a dozen men were seated in a semicircle, apparently heedless of a pungent odor of green hides and half cured furs which swept from the dank depths of the building behind them. They were listening, with grave faces, to the harangue of a young man whose slouch hat and shapeless linen suit proclaimed the back-State Mis-

sourian. The young man's face was red, and he was gesticulating violently. His words came to David quite distinctly for a minute or so:

"Damn my soul, men, it's more than human flesh can bear! They come over in organized bands—like troops, mind you—and murder people in their beds. They murder men, women, and children; and steal niggers? Why, they think nothing of taking ten thousand dollars' worth of property and shooting the owner into the bargain. Bleeding Kansas? The name is a mockery! And why is it, men? Why do we Missourians have to suffer like that? All because a few fanatics and demagogues a thousand miles away decide to send immigrants and money out to Kansas, to keep the State free. They don't know anything about slavery, and they don't care. They just want to stick their damned noses into somebody else's business. They're glad, actually glad, when one of their hired murderers kills and robs a poor farmer who has been settled in this country twenty years or more, and has asked nothing but to mind his own business."

David, passing on, spent a moment in troubled thought. There was something ominous about all this. The fury and excitement over the slave question was mounting to a dangerous pitch. He wished that something could be done about it. If only the fanatics on either side could be smothered, so that men of common sense could step in and work out some way to settle the thing!

In days gone by, it had not been uncommon to hear cool, dispassionate men discussing the question and putting forward intelligent propositions for compromise; but now there seemed to be no more cool and dispassionate men. Instead, firebrands like the young Missourian in the linen suit were on every hand, reciting their wrongs and threatening more bloodshed. Occasionally it was an Abolitionist who was talking, and who was presenting the other side of the question with the extravagant fury which, in our day, has been passed to the revolutionary radical. Along the river, however, it was generally a pro-slavery man threatening secession and the extinction of the North by means of a cotton boycott.

Probably most of us are familiar with the state of affairs in that ominous, rumbling year of 1859. The act of Congress known as the Missouri Compromise, passed

in 1821, had prohibited slavery north of latitude thirty-six degrees and thirty minutes. In 1850 the pro-slavery men had found that this restriction would soon make them a minority factor in the United States government, so an effort was made to repeal the Missouri Compromise. Stephen A. Douglas, of Illinois, engineered the passage of a bill known as the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which provided that new States and Territories, regardless of any line of latitude, might have slavery clauses in their constitutions if a majority of their inhabitants so desired.

The passage of this act, in 1854, caused a rush for the Territory of Kansas by beligerent slaveholders and militant free soil men. Each group intended to control Kansas, and as a result of their strife had come the massacres at Lawrence, Pottawatomie Creek, and elsewhere. Years of bloody fighting had left the antislavery men in control of Kansas, and in 1859 her internal troubles were over; but the Kansans, in retaliation for earlier offenses of the Missouri settlers, were crossing the border now and then to murder and pillage, enacting what were known as jayhawker raids.

Elsewhere in the United States, the stormy days of the Lincoln-Douglas debates had passed; the Dred Scott case had been decided by the Supreme Court, to the joy of slaveholders and the fury of Abolitionists; the underground railway was transporting slaves from the South to Canada, and Southern police officials were taking arrogant means to recover fugitives in the North.

David found all fanaticism rather foolish, and saw no great menace in the situation. A great many violent things had been done, and were being done, but affairs of violence had been common throughout his lifetime, and he could not believe that sane and steady business men would permit the fanatics to go much further. This, perhaps, is a failing of busy men. They cannot believe that the majority of a people can be so unpractical as to let a minority of radicals drag them into war or disaster.

XX

AFTER stopping in the offices maintained by the partnership, to talk for a moment to Marshall Keyes, David went on to the levee. He was to take out the old Henry Chouteau that afternoon. A special trip to St. Joseph, Missouri, had been arranged

for her, and as David knew the Missouri River better than her regular master, he had decided to relinquish his New Orleans run for one trip. He liked to keep in touch with the latest conditions on all the Western waters.

He mounted to the hurricane deck of the craft which had seen his wedding celebration and his first river successes, smiling around him affectionately. The old Chouteau showed signs of wear and tear, but she was still stanch and capable of good service. Her engines were no longer in charge of McKenzie, but they still showed the effect of his care.

David left his high hat in the cabin which had once been decorated as his bridal chamber, and, returning to the guard rail, looked upon the familiar levee scene. The deck hands were carrying aboard a few final pieces of freight. He noted with passing interest that the cases they carried were heavy, except for several crates of wheels, which were boxed in pairs.

"Farm wagons," David muttered, "for Kansas."

A few passengers straggled on board, and one sick man was brought up the gangplank on a litter. Soon the mate looked up and reported that all was ready for the start. David promptly sounded the warning whistle, and a few minutes later the boat was under way. After he had turned her over to the pilots, he settled himself forward of the texas.

The Chouteau's nose was pointing upstream this time, and she was struggling with the heavy current created by certain harbor improvements made a few years before by a young engineer officer of the United States army, Lieutenant Robert E. Lee. As she slowly passed the foot of Washington Avenue, her captain's eyes were attracted by a large sign on a water front building—"Fitzwilliam & Burke." That was Sally Anne's uncle.

He recalled the time when Sally Anne had waited in vain in another office conducted by John Fitzwilliam, because a steamboat clerk had failed to deliver her note until it was too late. David wondered what would have happened if he had received it in time to rush up the levee and effect a reconciliation. Wouldn't their affair have come to the same end anyhow? Weren't they bound always to misunderstand each other? He was strongly inclined to think so.

He had encountered Sally Anne on the street a few days before. She showed a little of her twenty-eight years, perhaps, but she had not changed perceptibly. She was still unmarried and still popular. Half a dozen young men had greeted her while she talked with David.

She was still gay and full of mischief, too. She had asked after Alice and the baby with a perfectly proper intonation, but there had been mockery in her eyes, as if she thought his marital responsibilities rather a joke.

"You look tired, David," she had said in parting. "Being a father must worry you!"

"I feel fine," he had reassured her bluntly.

"Well and good!" she had answered. "That's all that is necessary for a man. Let his body be well, and he has no other worries."

Which was probably true enough. Sally Anne was acute, beyond doubt. She could reason out things like that.

This reminded David of Johnson Hicks. If ever a man should be bothered, he ought to have been concerned over Hicks. Johnson had sworn to be revenged on him, and to kill him on sight, after the steamboat race and the wedding; but David had never seen his rival since then. Johnson had disposed of his interest in the Tigress, and no one knew what had become of him.

After a while the Henry Chouteau got past the disappearing bit of land known as Bloody Island, and began to make faster progress. Just before nightfall she arrived at the mouth of the Missouri River, and was turned upstream. As a general thing, pilots did not run after nightfall on the Missouri, but there was to be an early moon, and the water was fair, so that it was safe to go on until midnight, and perhaps throughout the night.

The trip went on without incident, as hundreds of trips had gone during the past two years. David had encountered houses floating in mid river, had weathered terrific storms, had rescued passengers from sinking and burning steamboats, had quelled one or two riots, and had lived the life of a riverman generally, but he still regarded the two preceding years as uneventful ones, because nothing had happened to a boat under his command.

This trip was particularly smooth. They passed Jefferson City and Boonville, and entered upon wild and desolate stretches of

river, where even shore cabins were infrequent. The pilots found the water falling, and laid up for the third night.

On the evening of the fourth day they were struggling along somewhere above Independence Landing when, quite suddenly, David became aware that several of the passengers were on the hurricane deck. There was nothing out of the ordinary in this, except that thus far they had spent most of their time below, drinking and gambling. The captain wondered idly what could have caused their sudden eagerness for fresh air.

Then, without warning, he heard the engine bells ring and found the head of the boat being turned in toward the bank. He jumped to his feet, to stare in amazement at the pilot house. One of the men on the hurricane deck produced a heavy pistol and leveled it at David, saying nothing. The act was imitated by the others, and he saw a dozen pistols in a dozen hands.

"Just stay quiet, captain," said one. "We've taken your boat for the time being."

This was preposterous! Doubting his own sanity, David glanced aloft, to discover that the pilot house had been entered by more armed men, and that the pilot was landing the boat under compulsion.

"You see, captain," continued the man who had first spoken, "we got a certain interest in your cargo, so we're going to stop here and see it landed. To-morrow you'll be free to go on your way."

"No, he won't!" threatened a new voice.

David turned, to face Johnson Hicks. Although surprised, he recalled the man who had been brought aboard in a litter. Johnson Hicks had pretended sickness and had been receiving meals in his stateroom throughout the voyage.

"No, Rudd," went on Hicks, "you won't be free! Your crew will, but you won't. Some of these men will see to that!" Johnson turned to the others. "Well," he said, "I told you I'd get the stuff loaded and up this far, and I did. It's in the hold, and the boat is yours. As for this man Rudd, he's an Abolitionist, so you'd better account for him before you leave her!"

This brought a furious murmur from the others. David saw one make a quick movement to fire, but Johnson Hicks leaped forward and knocked the pistol aside.

"Not now, you fool!" he growled. "You'd never get the stuff unloaded if his

crew found out you'd hurt him. They'd be liable to burn the boat or blow her up."

XXI

DAVID remained near his chair, still incredulous, while Johnson Hicks went to the guards and gave the necessary orders for landing. David could hear them repeated by unfamiliar voices below. Obviously the crew was working at the pistol point.

As soon as the boat was tied, David was ordered into his room in the Texas. The men who accompanied him tied his wrists together and made him get into his bunk and lie face down. One man, pistol in hand, seated himself within a few feet, by way of a guard. The others, from what David could hear, put themselves at ease outside the Texas, waiting for darkness to hide their further activities.

Their talk, which was free and venomous, was similar to that of the back-State man in the doorway of the fur and hide warehouse in St. Louis—principally denunciation of jayhawkers and Abolitionists. Within a few minutes David discovered that the cargo which had been consigned to the Chouteau, in innocent guise, consisted largely of firearms and ammunition. There were even pieces of artillery on board. These were to be delivered to proslavery men who were planning to execute a gigantic raid on Kansas, in reprisal for jayhawker outrages.

The men who had taken possession of the Henry Chouteau were border fighters. They had been in various bloody affrays in the days when Kansas was ruled by two hostile Territorial governments, one slave and one free. Some had helped to hunt for John Brown, following the massacre at Dutchman's Crossing, on Osawatimie Creek. Others had been members of the guerrilla bands which had attempted to support the Lecompton Legislature.

Johnson Hicks came into the room for a moment. He examined David's bindings and grunted in a satisfied way.

"Well, Rudd," he mocked, "we've got you tied fast! I'm sorry to see this—I'll declare I am! You've been a first-class enemy, and I hoped we could shoot it out between us some day."

David found himself strangely unperturbed. He had been more nervous, in fact, on foggy nights on the river.

"I don't recall being your enemy at all," he said. "I don't recall even bothering about you."

"A good speech, Rudd, but hardly a true one. I'll bet I've been on your mind a good deal. One doesn't flout a man like me lightly!" Hicks straightened and laughed. "I can hardly believe it—you, lying there tied up like a chicken! Well, you ran up an awful score against me, and there've been times when I thought I'd never have a chance to even it. When I got an agent to bamboozle Marshall Keyes into sending this cargo up here, I never dreamed that you would take command of the boat, so I could kill two birds with one stone; but you did, and the world will soon be rid of you!"

"Very well," said David. "Good-by, Johnson."

Johnson Hicks laughed, with a note of admiration.

"Good-by, Rudd," he said.

He lingered, as if to say something more, but finally gave a shrug of his shoulders and disappeared.

Shortly afterward the creak of oars came from below, and David heard several of the border men on the lower deck shout directions to the oarsman. Then the voice of Johnson Hicks rose from a greater distance, hallooing to the men on the Henry Chouteau.

"Good-by, boys!" he called. "Good luck!"

Evidently Johnson's part in the affair was over. He had got the arms on board, and had arranged the coup by which the steamer was taken from the control of her lawful officers. The border men had no more need of him, and it was best for him to take flight.

Interference with steamboat officers was a serious crime. Filibustering against Kansas was a crime, too, but was not likely to be taken seriously by officials on the Missouri side of the border. Still, it was wise for Johnson to get out of the way.

For a while David indulged the hope that another Missouri River boat might come in sight of the Chouteau before laying up for the night. If this happened, the craft would certainly be brought alongside, and her officers would come on board for a visit. An hour passed, however, and David did not hear the whistle blast for which he was waiting.

The light that streamed through his doorway became red, and then purple. When no one was talking, he could hear the evening calls of birds on shore. He spent some

time identifying such as he knew—the liquid chirping of the thrasher family, the trill of the robins, the plaintive note of the oriole, and the swinging whistle of the thrush.

The Texas tender, a badly frightened negro, was brought in at the pistol point to give him a meal and to help him feed himself. By the time this ceremony was ended, and he was alone with his guard, night was at hand. The guard lit a candle, placing it on a shelf, so that its light fell clearly on David.

The prisoner's arms began to ache because of their constrained position. They were not tied behind him, but lay under his stomach. He tried to shift them, but the guard glared quickly in his direction.

Time passed slowly. Now and then others came up and glanced in through the doorway. Some of them muttered a word or so, but the man with David kept silent, staring most of the time at the black square made by the door frame.

David began to study his guard, and it was not long before he had made a pretty fair estimate of the man. The guard was long and lean, with a drooping mustache. His face had little color in it, and his clothing was frayed and stained by rain and mud. He wore a wide-brimmed felt hat and carried a knife in his right boot, with the blade along the calf of his leg and the hilt protruding above the top. The fact that his hair and mustache were black and uncut gave him a ferocious look, but David made out that his appearance was belied by a listless manner. His movements were slow and languid.

Finally, as David lay watching him, wagon wheels creaked on the bank, and a mule brayed.

"Here they are!" somebody shouted.

All the men on the hurricane deck seemed to go clattering down the companionway which led below. Evidently they were about to transfer the cargo of weapons to wagons, and take it inland. Shouts of greeting and vigorous orders to the deck hands made it certain that this was the case.

Now David realized that throughout the last hour or so he had been making a plan of action—or, if not actually making a plan, considering possibilities. Quite suddenly he decided to stop thinking and go into action.

For the moment attention was centered on the doings ashore, where the mules and their drivers were creating a good deal of

confusion. David had only his guard to deal with. He must seize this chance or meet death before morning. Border men thought little of murder; they scarcely regarded it as a crime.

Through a tense moment he gathered his muscles, then raised his legs and flung them outside his bunk. Half leaping, half rolling outward, he hurled himself upon the guard.

The stateroom was narrow, of course, and the ferocious-looking Missourian sat not more than three feet away, with a huge percussion revolver lying on his lap. David floundered over him before he could grasp the butt of the weapon, and it clattered to the floor. There was a grunt of surprise, and then the Missourian's hands swung upward to catch David's throat. At the same time his lips parted to utter a cry for help.

Then the guard was put abruptly out of action, and the cry for help was reduced to a faint groan. There was a method of fighting with which the border man was not familiar. That was river fighting—Natchez fighting—raftsman's fighting. It was a method which took cognizance of the offensive value of every member of a man's body. Rivermen fought with their feet, knees, hands, elbows, fingers, nails, and teeth—also with their heads.

As a storehouse of strategy, the head is still recognized as a thing of value in combat, but as an offensive weapon it has gone out of fashion. People of to-day, like the border ruffian opposed to David, consider it of little value; but David knew otherwise. He knew that many a huge braggart had been butted into insensibility by some little man with a hard head. He had heard deck hands brag that if they could only get their heads down, they would certainly get their man.

One gambler, of the name of Devoll, was famous for the terrific blow he could deliver when butting an antagonist. Devoll's head, used this way, had never failed to shatter a jawbone, or, if it struck lower, to break several ribs.

As the border man attempted to close with him, David put his feet together, squeezed his elbows to his ribs, and drove his head against the point of the Missourian's jaw. The result was all that a modern prize fighter might have obtained with a perfect uppercut. The guard crashed backward upon his chair and fell from it to the floor. Near one sprawling knee, the hilt of his knife showed.

David knelt beside his fallen enemy, caught the knife in his right hand, and turned the blade back under a loop of rope which bound his wrists. It was not easy to get its edge twisted to a cutting position, but his hands were huge, muscled affairs, and they found strength for the maneuver. David made two or three sawing strokes, and the rope parted. This gave him more freedom, and he was able to cut directly through the principal knot.

A moment later the selfsame rope had been placed on the guard's wrists, and a gag had been stuffed in the man's mouth.

Wearing the guard's slouch hat and carrying the heavy pistol, David stepped quickly through the stateroom door and moved off in the shadow of the texas. A quick glance, front and rear, revealed that the hurricane deck was deserted. Keeping close against the texas wall, David worked his way astern.

Two staterooms were dark, but a candle was flickering in the third. David came up to the window, and was able to peep in unobserved, because of the latticed shutter that was a feature of all steamboat windows. It was used because it screened the room behind it, but admitted air.

Inside were the mate, both pilots, and the watchman, all sitting on the edge of a bunk. Their hands and legs were free, but they were confronted by another guard, who had them covered with two pistols.

Again David moved without hesitation. He made one long step into the little room and shoved his pistol against the guard's ear. The mate uttered a faint cry of joy and seized the man's weapons. The others bound and gagged him.

Then David issued a few whispered orders and departed, followed by the mate. The pilots and the watchman remained behind. They would have certain duties to perform on the hurricane deck before long, but they could not leave the stateroom at this time, because it was on the landward side of the boat, and the passage of many men through its lighted door might easily cause alarm on the bank.

David and the mate hurried around the texas to the larboard wheelhouse, a large curving structure which covered the paddle wheel on that side. The mate, on the way, caught up a coil of rope from a lifeboat set near the guards.

Making fast to the guard rail, they dropped the rope down over the sloping sur-

face of the wheelhouse. Then, steadying themselves with the rope, they walked down the wheelhouse roof, bringing up opposite the engine room on the main deck. Descending in this way, they were screened from observation, unless some thoroughly alert watcher was stationed near the larboard rail of the boiler deck.

As it happened, it would have been possible for them to use the larboard companionways, since the Missourians did not anticipate trouble from the river side of the boat; but they dared not take the risk of following the usual passages.

On the main deck they discovered both engineers seated near the throttle wheel. After a brief conference, one man was left at the throttle, while the other fell in with David and the mate. They made their way forward.

Just ahead of the engine room was a dingy territory given to the boilers and to the flues and combustion chambers of the furnaces. It was then, and is now, the custom to set steamboat boilers high off the wooden deck, on piers of brick. Underneath the flues there is a clear space of two or three feet, and in cold weather deck hands and firemen crawl into this well warmed region to sleep.

David and the men with him were fully aware of the habits of deck hands and firemen, and they knew that they would be certain to find a considerable number hidden beneath the flues at such a time as this. It would be uncomfortably warm, but much more comfortable than regions abandoned to the Missourians, who were too lavish in their display of pistols.

In five minutes' time a dozen firemen and deck hands had been routed out and brought alongside the boilers. While they gathered pokers and crowbars, by way of arming themselves, a negro was sent scouting. He returned with a fairly definite report:

"I don't know how many's up above, marstah cap'n, but most of 'em has gone on the bank, to stand around the wagons and keep the boys from running away in the woods. They's two or three men by the gangplanks on the fo'castle, and they's two more by the main hatch, watchin' the hands go down in the hold for the boxes. If they don't come up lively, they makes 'em hurry. One or two wagons has been loaded a'ready, but they've only just started."

This made the maneuvering of David's

little army fairly obvious. A brief time was taken up in organizing two squads, one for the mate and one for David, and in assigning men to certain appointed tasks. Then they moved forward again, to spring from the dark and subdue the border men who were at the main hatch, just forward of the boilers.

A hasty foray down the hatch and into the hold by the mate's squad resulted in the subduing of another enemy and the recruiting of five deck hands.

There was no time to waste now. As it was, they had taken the risk of bringing the whole force on shore about their ears; so David and the mate led the way to a point near the forecabin, and called for a charge. The deck hands and firemen set to with enthusiasm, yelling in the various unearthly ways which best suited their instincts and complexions.

David ran straight for the gangplank, and knocked a surprised border fighter from the head of it. Deck hands, previously designated, manned the capstan and began to swing the plank aboard. The mate, leading his section, swept away four more Missourians and cut the lines that held the Chouteau to the bank.

Members of the crew who were on shore abandoned work at the wagons in a body, and fled toward the boat, amid a volley of pistol shots. David and his men helped to drag them aboard as the Chouteau began to fall away from the bank in the current.

David straightened from this work to shout to the pilots. Immediately afterward he heard a musical jingle from the engine room. The Chouteau began to back.

There came a furious yell from behind him, followed by a pistol shot, and a bullet whined in David's ear. He turned, to see a tall border man on the main stairway drop a smoking weapon and plunge to the deck as a giant negro brained him with an ax.

Another border fighter, trapped on the moving boat, opened fire from the rail of the boiler deck overhead. David returned the fire, and the man leaped back, darted a short distance astern, and dived into the river on the shore side.

Calling the crew together, David and the mate led a charge up the main stairs and along the promenades. Two more Missourians were driven overboard, and two were captured. One man, who barricaded himself in a stateroom, was killed by the mate. On the hurricane deck no one was found save the helpless individuals who had done duty as guards.

By now the Chouteau had her head turned downstream and was making as much way as the pilots dared give her. From the shore men were firing at her with rifles and pistols, partly in fury, and partly to harass her pilots.

Satisfied that his boat was cleared of intruders, David emptied two of the captured pistols, aiming at flashes on shore. The mate broke open several cases in the hold and set the deck hands to work with breech-loading rifles and brown paper cartridges. This had the effect of silencing the fire from shore and putting an end to pursuit along the banks.

The Henry Chouteau ran clear of the acrid clouds of powder smoke, and David resumed his chair at the forward end of the Texas.

(To be continued in the October number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

ON AN ANNIVERSARY

ACROSS the continent it lies,
An Eden land, a paradise—
There first I smiled into your eyes!

Beside a cliff in Eden land
The green waves tumble on the sand;
I kissed there your reluctant hand.

A rose bloomed red in Eden's bower,
As perfect as a lover's hour;
I plucked for you the royal flower.

A white road runs to Eden's sea,
Made fragrant by a lemon tree;
Ah, there you gave your heart to me!

Nelle Richmond Eberhart

Mr. Martin Swallows the Anchor

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN OLIVE'S ARDENT ADMIRER AND HER FORMIDABLE AUNT

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

OLIVE was weeping quietly, but Miss Torrance, sitting beside her in the dark, was very calm, and even a little scornful. The unmerited sufferings of the hero and heroine on the screen before them didn't trouble her. It was sure to come out all right in the end; and even if it didn't, who cared?

Olive was a sentimental little thing, and yet the strong-minded, prodigiously sensible Miss Torrance could understand, perhaps too well, how she felt. It wasn't the story that made Olive cry. It was the spectacle of that swift, vivid, intense life that so disturbed her; and it disturbed Miss Torrance, too.

Yachts, tropical islands, coral reefs, dark figures in oilskins seen by lightning flashes on storm-swept decks, clear lagoons, palm trees in the moonlight—when you saw all that, and when you thought of getting up six mornings a week at half past seven, and going down to the office, and coming back to the boarding house at twenty minutes past five, and when you were a stern, adventurous spirit, like Miss Torrance, or only twenty-one, like Olive—

Miss Torrance and Olive often talked about traveling. They even got booklets from the steamship companies, and planned routes and figured expenses. Olive took it all very seriously, but Miss Torrance smiled indulgently at such a childish pastime.

Miss Torrance was not the sort of woman to cry for the moon. She often said she wasn't, and she never suspected that she was one of those still more romantic creatures who try to build bridges to reach the moon. Olive longed for impossible things, but Miss Torrance tried to get them.

"Come, my dear!" said she, with just a trace of impatience. "This is where we came in."

"All right!" answered Olive, with a resigned sigh.

They squeezed past a row of people and went up the aisle and out into the lobby.

"Oh, mercy!" cried Olive. "Raining!"

Miss Torrance said nothing, but her brows met in an anxious frown.

The April rain was coming down in a steady torrent, drumming loud on the roof, and spattering on the pavement. The streets shone like deep, black water under the arc lights. Taxis spun by like incredibly swift motor boats. It hadn't at all the appearance of a shower. It was obstinately and definitely a rainy night—chill, too, and windy, so that it was almost impossible to believe that only six days ago, on Saturday, spring had begun, and Miss Torrance and Olive had been irresistibly tempted to buy spring hats.

"We'll take a taxi," said Miss Torrance. "It's cheaper than ruining our new hats."

"All right!" said Olive.

So Miss Torrance advanced to the very limit of the covered entrance, and signaled to the taxis that went by, fleet and careless; but not one of them stopped—no, not one.

"Beasts!" said she.

"Maybe they're all taken," suggested the gentle Olive, but Miss Torrance would have none of that.

She, too, still had in her mind the images of tropical islands and coral reefs and high adventures, and somehow it hurt and angered her, and the taxis that would not stop were like the stream of life itself that hurried past and left her behind.

"I'll make one stop!" she declared grimly. "Here!" Taking off her brave new hat, she thrust it into Olive's hands. "I'll stop one if I have to stand in the middle of the street!"

"Oh, don't!" cried Olive. "Wait just a minute!"

"Let me get you one," said a cheerful voice.

Turning, they both looked into the face of an unknown young man. It was by no means a face to inspire alarm, nor was his manner at all sinister. He was a sturdy, square-shouldered young chap, with a sun-burned face, in which his eyes looked amazingly blue. As he stood there, hat in hand, he looked altogether so good-humored and friendly and honest that Miss Torrance's glare softened.

"Well—" said she.

He needed no more than that grudging consent.

"Half a minute!" he cried, and off he darted into the rain.

"Oh!" cried Olive. "Oh, Miss Torrance! Oh, we forgot! We can't pay for it! We have only fifteen cents!"

"Oh!" said Miss Torrance, too.

She certainly had forgotten, for the moment, that they had come out simply for a walk, and hadn't meant to go to the movies, or to buy the cake of chocolate they had just eaten inside. To-morrow was pay day at the office, and only that morning Miss Torrance had deposited the week's surplus in the savings bank, and Olive never had any surplus.

"I'll stop him!" she said hurriedly, and she, too, dashed off into the rain.

Just as she reached the curb, the young man arrived there on the running board of a taxi.

"Here you are!" said he, opening the door.

"I meant—" said Miss Torrance. "Thank you just the same, but we have changed our minds. We—we are going in the subway; but thank you."

The lights from the brilliant lobby shone across the street, making it very bright where they were. The rain was pelting down on her sleek blond head. The valiant little white ruffle at her neck was already beaten flat, but she herself was indomitable—a little woman and a good-looking one, although, by her severe expression and her curt manner, you might fancy that she was trying to deny both the littleness and the

good looks, and to force you to remember only her thirty-five years and her ability to earn her own living.

"But—" protested the young man.

"Thank you, just the same," said Miss Torrance again, and, turning, hastened back to Olive.

The stranger was not a faint-hearted young man, however. He followed her.

"Look here!" he said earnestly. "You haven't even an umbrella. You'll catch cold!"

"Thank you, but it can't be helped," said Miss Torrance.

She spoke sternly, but she didn't really dislike this man. There was something rather engaging about him, and she was very much pleased to observe that not once did he even glance at Olive. Miss Torrance did not wish strange young men to look at Olive.

"I meant to take a taxi, anyhow," said he. "Won't you please let me drop you?"

He looked at Miss Torrance with a wistful, humble expression, which she knew very well to be false. There was precious little humility in that young man! Still, she didn't dislike him on that account, either. Indeed, she was almost ready to smile, when he added:

"I'm going through West Twelfth Street. If you live anywhere near there—"

All thoughts of smiling abandoned her.

"Thank you, *no!*" she replied frigidly.

"Good evening! Come, Olive!"

To her dismay, Olive did not come.

"Let's!" the girl whispered. "Why not? He seems—"

Politely the young man stepped back a little. Miss Torrance gave Olive a long and severe glance.

"No!" said she.

Olive was silent for a moment. Then she raised her eyes to her friend's face.

"But I'd like to," she said quietly.

Then Miss Torrance had her turn at being silent.

"Very well!" she said, at last.

In those two words there was something not far from tragedy. Miss Torrance was not stupid. She had seen in Olive's face the dawn of a new spirit of independence, and the shadow of the end of her own fiercely benevolent despotism. And she loved Olive so!

She put on her hat—such a smart little hat!—and, at that moment, she hated it. It was absurd that any one who felt as she

did just then should wear a jaunty little hat like this!

The young man was standing by the open door of the taxi. In they got, she and Olive side by side, the stranger facing them. There was something else in that cab which almost stifled Miss Torrance—something which she insisted upon in stories, but found unbearable here—something known professionally as “heart interest.” Olive did not speak one word, and did not stir. The stranger’s conversation was quite impersonal, and yet Miss Torrance knew. It seemed to her that she knew exactly what was in the minds of her companions.

The young fellow’s cheerful voice was speaking in the darkness.

“Beastly weather, isn’t it?” he remarked, to fill a long, long pause.

“Personally,” said Miss Torrance, “I don’t believe in thinking about the weather. I agree with Dr. Johnson that it is contemptible for a being endowed with reason to live in dependence upon the weather and the wind.”

“Well—” said the young man, who knew not Dr. Johnson, but was respectful toward Miss Torrance. “You can’t help it very well at sea, you know.”

“Have you been at sea?” came Olive’s clear little voice.

“Ever since I was seventeen. I’m chief officer now,” he answered, with modest pride. “Passenger ship.”

It seemed to Miss Torrance that even as he spoke she could smell a salty vigor in the air. He came from the sea, did he—the sea of which she and Olive talked so often? He was a sailor, was he? Miss Torrance’s heart sank, remembering all that she and Olive had said about sailors. The romance of the sea—what nonsense!

They had reached the house. The young man sprang out and held open the door of the cab; but he stood in the doorway, so that no one could get out.

“I wish I could see you again!” he said earnestly. “We’re not sailing until Monday—engine trouble. The cargo’s all in, and I know I could get another afternoon or evening on shore.”

He waited.

“My name’s Martin—Sam Martin,” he went on anxiously. “I—I know a fellow who lives in your house—Robertson. He could tell you—”

“We don’t know any one in the boarding house,” said Miss Torrance stiffly;

“but thank you for bringing us home, Mr. Martin. Good evening!”

The house door closed behind them, leaving them in the dark hall and Mr. Martin out in the rain. Miss Torrance began to mount the stairs, and Olive followed her, rather slowly. They entered the room which they shared.

“How,” inquired Miss Torrance, “did that young man know we lived on West Twelfth Street?”

“Well,” said Olive, who was taking off her shoes, so that her fair head was bent and her face not to be seen, “I think perhaps he saw me coming out of the house this morning.”

II

Now Olive was not inclined to object to anything that Miss Torrance might say or do. Her memory for office details was not remarkable, but her memory of her friend’s thousand queer little kindnesses was unalterable, ineffaceable.

When she had been left an orphan by the death of her father, the very first person to arrive at the house was Miss Torrance, her mother’s cousin; and as soon as Miss Torrance entered the door, she had taken charge of the bewildered and heart-broken girl. She had brought Olive home with her, got her into bed, brought up dinner to her herself, and looked after her in a brisk, matter-of-fact way for a long, weary fortnight.

There remained, for Olive to remember forever and ever, a Miss Torrance who got up half a dozen times on bitter winter nights to mix medicines and heat broth and milk, or even to talk pleasantly to an invalid who sometimes wept for sorrow and weariness; a Miss Torrance who rose earlier in the morning to attend to Olive’s breakfast, who rushed back from the office at lunch time with little delicacies, who hurried home at five o’clock as brisk, as competent, as unfailingly kind as ever. Her salary was not a large one, yet she was ready, was glad and willing, to feed, clothe, and shelter Olive for the rest of her days. She loved the girl. From the very first moment that Olive had wept on her shoulder she had loved her in a fierce, generous, tyrannical way of her own.

She had never loved any one before, and sometimes she couldn’t quite understand why she was so very, very fond of Olive; for the girl had none of the qualities which

Miss Torrance herself possessed, and which she admired in others. Olive was a slender, quiet young girl, pretty enough in her gentle way, but not of the type Miss Torrance was wont to praise. Her brown eyes had a wistful sort of eagerness, and her mouth was oversensitive. Altogether, there was something dreamy and unpractical about her.

At the end of the fortnight she had told Miss Torrance that she wanted to set about earning her own living. The older woman was torn between her wish to shelter and protect this gentle young creature and her conviction that every human being should work. Conviction conquered, and she found a place for Olive in the office of the *Far Afield* magazine, of which she was fiction editor. With a severe sort of patience, she labored over Olive until she had made a pretty fair worker out of her, but she had no illusions as to the girl's lack of business ability. She had begun now to train her for the career of a writer, and she saw more hope in that.

They were not friends in the office. Miss Torrance would not permit it. Directly they entered the building, all intimacy was put aside until five o'clock. They did not even lunch together, because Miss Torrance considered it a bad precedent. Yet, the morning after the meeting with that Mr. Martin, Miss Torrance, to save her life, could not help looking very often through the half open door of her office toward the end of the outer room where Olive sat.

"Nonsense!" she said impatiently to herself. "She'll forget him in a week. She doesn't know him—doesn't know anything about him. He wasn't at all the type to suit her. A very ordinary, commonplace young man! I'm glad I discouraged him. He was inclined to be troublesome."

Olive was quietly working away, as usual.

"If she were—interested in him," thought Miss Torrance uneasily, "she'd look different."

The telephone on her desk rang.

"Miss Torrance speaking!" she said briskly.

"This is Sam Martin," came the answer. "I wanted to ask you and—and—I don't know her last name, but I think I heard you call her Olive—I wanted to ask you both to lunch."

A sort of panic seized Miss Torrance. Was she never to be rid of this young man, never to have Olive all to herself again?

"Olive cannot come," she answered, in a voice that trembled with anger.

"Then won't you?" said he. "I'd like very much to talk to you." She consented to that, and at twelve o'clock she put on her jaunty little hat and hurried out of the office, giving Olive a very strained smile as she passed her.

How much she regretted having consented to see Mr. Martin! She had meant to crush him utterly, to point out to him how ungentlemanly, how disgraceful, it was for him to persecute two defenseless women with his unwelcome attentions; but instead of being offended or ashamed, all he did was to entreat her for a chance.

"Just give me a fair chance!" he begged. "If you find you don't like me, why, there'll be no harm done. Let me come to see you, or write!"

"No!" said Miss Torrance. "It's ridiculous. It can't possibly matter to you."

"It does," he declared.

For a moment they were both silent, sitting at the table in the very good restaurant, and not eating the very good lunch the young man had ordered.

"Look here, Miss Torrance!" he went on. "I've got to tell you. I'd been in to stay overnight with Robertson, and in the morning I saw—her—going out. The moment I saw her, I—look here, Miss Torrance, you'll have to believe me—the moment I saw her—she's so—I—I can't tell you; but she's so—sweet!"

Miss Torrance could not endure this. She could not endure the sound of his earnest, entreating voice, his pathetically inadequate words, or the sight of his unhappy, honest young face. She did know whether she was contemptuous and angry, or even more unhappy than he was; but she did know very positively that she wanted to get away, wanted to end this.

"You don't know Olive," she said coldly; "and I do. I tell you frankly, Mr. Martin, that I shall do all I can to protect her from—" She stopped. "She's all I have in the world!" her heart cried. "I won't let her go. I won't let her see you! Because, if she does see you—you confident, good-looking, detestable creature!—how can she help loving you and forgetting me, and how shall I live without her?"

"But I'm—I give you my word I'm—respectable!" said he, in despair. "I'll tell you all about myself. I'll get people to write you letters about me. I—"

"I don't doubt you, Mr. Martin," said Miss Torrance, with a chilly smile; "but that's not the point. You'll pardon me, but I see no advantage to Olive in making the acquaintance of a man whom she might never see again. A sailor's life—"

"Oh, but look here! If she would marry me—"

"Marry you?" cried Miss Torrance. "What preposterous nonsense is this, when you haven't spoken half a dozen words to each other?"

"I can't help it," said he, terribly downcast, but resolute. "That's the way it is with me; and if she even seemed to—to be beginning to like me, I'd give up the sea."

Miss Torrance smiled—not a trustful smile.

"I mean it!" said he. "I have to make this trip, but when I come back, I'll stay. I promised, long ago, that if ever I met a girl I wanted to marry, I'd swallow the anchor."

"Indeed!" said Miss Torrance.

Like all innocent persons who wish to be convincing, Mr. Martin added details.

"The best friend I ever had made me promise that," he went on. "He'd had a hard lesson when he tried to mix the two—falling in love and going to sea, I mean. He lost his ticket and his girl both."

"Indeed!" said Miss Torrance again. "Very interesting, I'm sure!" The poor young man believed that she meant that.

"Yes," he said, "it is an interesting story. This chap—I'll call him Smith, if you don't mind, because naturally he wouldn't like to be named. It happened some time ago—eighteen or twenty years ago, and this chap was third officer on a cargo steamer running between London and Antwerp. Well, one trip he met a girl in London, and he—well, you know, he liked her, and she seemed to like him. He told her when he'd be likely to dock again, and she said that that was her birthday, and that she wanted him to come to a little dance she was having. Well, of course, he got her a present. He pretty well broke himself to get her something he thought she'd like, and I suppose he thought about her a good deal. A fellow would, you know, at night, on watch, you know, and so on. Well, they got in the morning of the very day he'd said—docked at Tilbury—and then the old man told him he needn't expect to get ashore this trip. The first was married and lived in London, and the

second was signing off, so Smith would have to stay on board. Of course he couldn't say anything, but it hit him pretty hard. Look here, Miss Torrance, does this bore you?"

"No," said Miss Torrance, who was interested in spite of herself.

"Well, then, as soon as the others had cleared out, Smith stepped ashore and telephoned to her. She began to tell him how glad she was, and how she'd been hoping he'd be able to come to her dance, and he had to tell her he couldn't come. She asked him"—Martin grinned—"she asked him if he couldn't tell the captain it was her birthday, and then she asked him if he couldn't get some one to do his work for him. You know, girls never understand responsibility; but they're—there's something sweet about—"

"Oh, nonsense!" said Miss Torrance sharply.

"Anyhow, this girl didn't—or wouldn't—understand. She said if he didn't come that night, he needn't ever come. She told him he was no better than a slave—had no spirit, and so on. Well, there he was! It was a rainy day, and—ever seen Tilbury Docks on a rainy day? I wish I knew how to give you the—the effect. It's the most dismal, desolate place you'd ever want to see. The Alberta was coaling, too, and you know what that means.

"Except for a steward and some of the crew, there was no one on board but Smith and the second engineer, and they didn't hit it off very well. The cargo was all out of her, and the new lot not coming in till the next morning. The coaling was nearly done, and there was a train up to London about four o'clock. Well, if you were making a story out of this, you'd put in a lot here about a moral struggle. He must have had one, you know—love and duty," said Mr. Martin, obviously pleased with his phrase. "That's it—a struggle between love and duty, and love conquered. He must have been very fond of that girl! He went to town on the four o'clock train. He saw his girl, and she must have been a remarkably pig-headed, unreasonable young person. She said she'd marry him if he would give up the sea, but he would have to make up his mind then and there, or she'd know he didn't really care for her. So he said he'd let her know before he sailed.

"The dance broke up pretty late, so Smith went to spend the night with a friend

of his in London, and took the first train back to Tilbury in the morning. Hadn't been able to sleep all night, trying to make up his mind whether he'd give up the sea or the girl. Well, he got back, and on the dock he meets the marine superintendent of the line—a terrible old fellow, Captain Leavitt. Poor Smith felt pretty sick when he saw the captain. Anyhow, he says 'Good morning, sir,' and goes on to explain that he'd just stepped ashore for a bit of breakfast at the hotel.

"Ship's breakfast not good enough for you, eh?" says old Leavitt.

"Oh, yes, sir," says Smith. "It wasn't that—"

"If you've any complaints to make," says old Leavitt, with a queer sort of grin, "now's the time to make 'em, Mr. Smith!"

"Smith said he had none."

"Satisfied with the Alberta, eh?" asks old Leavitt. "Everything all right on board when you stepped ashore for a little breakfast, Mr. Smith?"

"By this time Smith felt pretty sure that Captain Leavitt knew how long he'd been away, but he thought he'd better try to see it through. So he says yes, everything was all right."

"Humph!" says old Leavitt, staring hard at him. "Well! So you're quite sure everything's all right on board this morning, eh?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" says Smith.

At that Leavitt takes his arm, and, without another word, stumps along beside him to the Alberta's berth. The Alberta wasn't there!

"Sure everything's all right on board, eh?" says Captain Leavitt. "My eyes aren't as good as they were."

"Poor Smith just stared and stared at the empty slip. He couldn't say one word."

"She's gone to the bottom!" shouts Captain Leavitt. "And too bad you didn't go there with her, you young liar and blackguard!"

"Do you find that humorous?" demanded Miss Torrance, with a severe glance at his laughing face.

"Well, I can't help it!" said Martin. "No one was hurt, you know. The trimmers had loaded her down too much on one side, and she simply rolled over and sank. And when you think of old Leavitt asking him if everything was all right on board, when he knew all the time, I can't help thinking it's funny!"

Martin stopped, quite overcome with laughter.

"This friend of yours—this Smith—did he consider it funny?"

"Oh, Lord, no! But he's a serious, high-minded sort of fellow. He thought it was a disgrace, you know, and he went off and told the girl that he was disgraced and ruined, and she threw him over. He never got over it, and that's why he got me to promise that if ever I—well, you know, if I got seriously interested in a girl, I'd swallow the anchor. I think he's right. It's not fair to a girl—"

Miss Torrance rose.

"I think, Mr. Martin," said she, with a frigid little smile, "that if I were you, I shouldn't renounce my trade."

"Profession," Mr. Martin suggested.

"Occupation," Miss Torrance compromised. "It is one thing for you to be seriously interested in a girl, and quite another thing for her to be seriously interested in you."

And with that she walked off, leaving her unfortunate young host standing beside the table, on which remained the last course of that excellent lunch.

III

It was a lamentable day. There was a smoky fog outside, which was, for some reason, twice as bad inside the house. When Miss Torrance let herself in, the ill lit hall was thick with it, and the puny gas jet spurted as if panting for breath.

As usual, she stopped at the hall table to look at the letters there. She picked one up hastily, and put it into her hand bag. Then, as she was about to ascend the stairs, she caught sight of Mr. Robertson standing in the doorway of the sitting room.

"Good evening!" said he.

Even in the dusk, she could see the gleam of his white teeth as he smiled. She knew how he looked when he smiled, anyhow, for hadn't she been seeing him twice a day for at least six months? Olive had remarked that he "looked like a darling." Though Miss Torrance didn't agree with any such extravagant statement, she had secretly thought him a rather distinguished man—until she had learned that he was a friend of Mr. Martin's.

He was tall, very slender, very dark, with keen, thin features and an odd smile that lifted his neat black mustache up to his narrow nostrils, giving him an expres-

sion a little fierce, but altogether agreeable. Of course, she didn't know him, and wouldn't know him. Let him smile! He was a friend of that Mr. Martin's, and he and Mr. Martin were both in a conspiracy to rob her of Olive.

Still, she couldn't very well refuse to answer, and so she did, after a fashion. Mr. Robertson did not seem to be discouraged. He made another remark, which she also felt obliged to answer. Indeed, he began to talk, and so artful was he that before she realized what she was doing, Miss Torrance was engaged in conversation with him.

She was thus engaged when Olive came, but that brought her to herself. With the coldest little nod for Mr. Robertson, she went upstairs.

"I see you were talking to Mr. Robertson," Olive observed.

"I couldn't help it," said Miss Torrance, with a frown. "He's—well, I don't like the man."

Strange, then, that as she lay awake that night Miss Torrance should constantly see before her the image of Mr. Robertson—a tall, dark form in the dark hall, lounging against the hat stand in one of his characteristically easy and nonchalant attitudes! Strange that she should keep seeing his gleaming smile, and hearing in her ears his quiet, courteous voice!

All this caused her a curious uneasiness. For some reason it seemed to her a great misfortune, almost a disaster, that he had spoken to her. A very great misfortune!

There he was, however, whether she liked him or not.

Being in all things so much quicker and brisker than Olive, she got downstairs first in the morning. When she entered the dining room, Robertson spoke again, and smiled. He pulled out her chair for her, and paid her various polite little attentions not at all remarkable in themselves, but new to Miss Torrance. She couldn't actually be rude to the man, for he hadn't offended in any way, and he wasn't really obtrusive; but—

Morning and evening, for an endless week, she was obliged to see him, and to make civil responses to his civil greetings. By the end of the week she knew why she didn't like Mr. Robertson. She didn't like him because she couldn't manage him. She couldn't overawe him. She couldn't impress him. When she was with him, she couldn't really be Miss Torrance at all.

This, of course, she couldn't endure. She wasn't much used to talking to men, and she had a pretty poor opinion of them in general. She thought they ought to be ashamed of themselves, and Mr. Robertson evidently was not at all ashamed of himself. He was a surveyor of hulls, and she couldn't help admitting that he had advanced further in business knowledge than herself. He had lived in all sorts of outlandish places—in Surabaya, in Hongkong, in Cape Town. He knew the world, and seemed to take it for granted that she didn't. Apparently he regarded her as a dear, helpless little creature, and the incredible thing was that, while with him, Miss Torrance couldn't help feeling like that.

One morning, when they were alone in the dining room, talking together in what certainly looked like a friendly manner, she looked up at him and asked him a question, with exactly the look and the voice of a dear, helpless little creature. Mr. Robertson looked back at her. Their eyes met. This made Miss Torrance very angry.

"I'm down town almost every day," said Mr. Robertson. "Can't we arrange to have lunch together some day?"

"Thank you," said Miss Torrance, "but I have no time."

She said it in a way that Mr. Robertson could not very well help understanding. And the whole morning long she remembered this—remembered how the smile had vanished from his face, how stiffly he had bowed.

"I hope I did discourage him!" she told herself vehemently. "He's the friend of that troublesome Mr. Martin, and he's trying to scrape up an acquaintance with me, so that he can give messages and so on to Olive. Well, he shan't!"

IV

It was really spring now, a wild, gay April day, and Miss Torrance felt unusually restless. She was wearing a new suit, dark blue, very plain, very smart, and what with that and the spring in the air, she felt inclined to festivity. She thought it would be nice if she was going to meet somebody for lunch. Well, of course she wasn't, but instead of going to the tea room where she had been going for years, she went to a near-by hotel.

The first person she saw there was Olive, very cozily lunching with Mr. Robertson.

Miss Torrance got away without being seen, and went back to the office, for she did not want any lunch now. She went home a little earlier than usual, but she left nothing undone that should have been done.

Olive noticed nothing amiss with her friend. When she left the office, she didn't hurry. She was glad to go slowly through the sweet afternoon. The western sky was clear and clean, ready for the down going of the sun, and the quiet and beautiful light of that most beautiful hour shone full in her face. Seeing her at that moment, you could well understand why poor Mr. Martin had been so suddenly overwhelmed.

She gave a last glance at the sky before opening the front door. Then she entered the house and went upstairs. The door was closed, so she knocked.

"Come in!" answered Miss Torrance.

She was on her knees, packing her trunk.

"What are you doing?" cried Olive.

"I'm packing," answered Miss Torrance.

"I'm—going away."

"But why? Where?"

"I saw you!" cried Miss Torrance. "I saw you—with that man!"

Olive was silent, not by any means from guilt or confusion, but because she was struggling against an unwonted anger. She thought of a good many things to say in regard to this unwarrantable interference with her affairs, but she did not say one of them. Instead, she looked down at Miss Torrance, who was working away in hot haste, and every one of her friend's generousities and queer little kindnesses rose up before her. She crossed the room and knelt by the other woman's side, putting an arm about her shoulders.

"Oh, my dear!" she said gently. "If I've done anything to—to hurt you, can't you forgive me?"

"It's not that," said Miss Torrance, in a hard, cold voice. "I've nothing to forgive. It's simply that I've—I've made a fool of myself." The tears were rolling down her cheeks, but she pretended not to know it. "I've made the worst sort of fool of myself—and I will not face that man again! I will not!"

"But, darling," said Olive gently, "if you feel like that, we'll both go."

"No!" cried Miss Torrance, with a loud sob. "I will not come between you and your precious Mr. Martin!"

"What do you mean?" said Olive. "I don't—" She stopped. "That's silly, dar-

ling," she went on, in an airy sort of way. "I've forgotten all about Mr. Martin, and he's gone off to sea and forgotten all about me, long ago."

"He has not!" said Miss Torrance. "He wrote you two letters, and I tore them up. Take your arm away, please, and let me get up!"

Olive, too, had risen.

"My letters!" she said faintly. "I didn't think you would—"

"Well, now you know," said Miss Torrance. "Now you know what a—a beast I am!"

"Stop!" said Olive.

"I won't!" said Miss Torrance. "I pretended to myself that I wanted to save you, but to-day, when I saw you with that man, I knew that I was nothing but a jealous, meddlesome old—"

Suddenly they were in each other's arms, clinging to each other and weeping.

"Of course I'm going with you!" said Olive. "You might have known!"

V

It was nothing—nothing at all—for Olive to give up the hope of seeing Mr. Martin again. Twice only had her eyes rested upon his jolly, sunburned face, and it ought to have been very easy to forget that. His letters she had never seen, so they were surely nothing to think about. Altogether, he and his letters were only the briefest sort of episode in a life that might go on for thirty, forty, even fifty years longer.

She had so much to be thankful for—a good position, a comfortable home, and the immeasurable gratitude and devotion of her friend. Well, to be sure, she was as quietly good-tempered as usual, and gave no sign that she had not forgotten the whole thing; yet Miss Torrance knew that Olive hadn't forgotten.

She could read it in the girl's face, and she could read it in her own heart. She could understand how Olive felt about her lost Mr. Martin. She understood very well what it was to remember one face, one voice, so constantly that all others were a weariness.

"It really is like that!" she sometimes said to herself, with a sort of awe. "I didn't believe it, but it's true!"

She never spoke about this to Olive, nor did she think it necessary to tell her that a week after they left the boarding house

she had returned there, to see Mr. Robertson, and to get from him the address of the roving Mr. Martin. Mr. Robertson had gone away, the landlady didn't know where, so Miss Torrance was spared that humiliation, and had no inclination to mention it. She had done away with the young man so effectively that now, when she would have given her right hand to get him back for Olive, she couldn't find him.

She tried her very best to atone. She no longer attempted to interfere in Olive's affairs, for she no longer felt herself supremely competent to manage other people's affairs. Indeed, the poor little woman was sometimes so subdued, so crushed by remorse, that it was all Olive could do to enliven her.

There were times when Olive found it rather a strain to enliven any one, when she would have welcomed any one who would perform that kind office for her. Today was one of those days. The work in the office had been very heavy, and the weather was warm and sultry. She wanted to go home and rest, and yet she was reluctant to enter the new boarding house, so discouragingly like the old one.

She closed the front door behind her, and sighed. The servant had forgotten to light the gas, and the hall was inky black. There wasn't a sound in the house, and the only sign of life was a steamy smell of rice and mutton ascending from the basement.

Olive was about to go upstairs when the doorbell rang furiously, and she thought she would wait and see what it meant. There might be a telegram for herself. She knew of no living person to send her one, but still, who knows what may happen?

Anyhow, she lit the gas herself, and pretended to be looking at the letters on the rack. She heard the maid coming up the basement stairs. The bell rang again, louder and longer.

"Mercy on us!" said the servant. "You'd think it was a fire!" She opened the door, and in came a man, in great haste.

"Miss Torrance!" he said. "I want to see Miss Torrance at once!"

"She ain't in," said the maid, as if pleased.

"Look here!" said the stranger. "I made them tell me at her office where she lived, and this is the place, and I'm going to see her!"

"She ain't—" the servant began again, when Olive stepped forward.

"Will I do?" she asked.

"You!" he cried.

Olive was not so much startled as he, because she had been looking at Mr. Martin ever since he entered. Nor did she seem pleased. Mr. Martin had apparently come here filled with rage against her Miss Torrance, and that she would not tolerate.

"What was it you wanted?" she inquired coldly.

"I came," said Mr. Martin firmly, "about this story—in this magazine. It's—it's an outrage!"

"Oh!" cried Olive. "Oh! The—the story?"

He looked at her sternly, yet with a sort of compassion.

"Do you mean that you know about it?" he asked.

"Yes," said Olive, in a faint little voice. "But—I didn't think it was so—so bad."

Mr. Martin looked at her with growing horror.

"Look here!" he said. "You don't mean—you can't mean—it was signed with a man's name, but I felt sure Miss Torrance wrote it, because it's based on a story I told her myself, about Robertson. I called him 'Smith,' but I suppose she knew all the time—"

"No!" Olive interposed. "No! Mr. Martin, I'm awfully sorry, but—I wrote that story!"

"What? You?"

"I'm awfully sorry," Olive said again, and she looked so. "You see, Mr. Robertson told me the story himself, and he didn't say that it wasn't to be used."

"Naturally he didn't. It never entered his head that you would—"

"But, you see, I didn't mean—I didn't think—I only thought it was funny."

"Funny!" cried Mr. Martin, all his indignation returning. "You thought it was funny to say—wait a minute!" He pulled a magazine out of his pocket and turned the pages. "This!" he said in a terrible voice. "You say, 'The man went bowed under the weight of his infidelity. False to his duty, false to his inmost self, he—'"

"I didn't!"

"Here it is in black and white. 'Raising his glass in his shaking hand, he drank again, his bleared eyes peering—'"

"I did not!" cried Olive.

"You've made him out a drunken old beach comber—Robertson, the finest fellow who ever lived! You've got all the

facts there—any one could recognize 'em. You say—"

Olive could endure no more of this nightmare. She snatched the magazine out of his hands. "Remorse," the story was called, and the author's name was given as "John Hunt." She suddenly collapsed upon the bottom step of the stairs.

For a moment the young man remained the just and stern judge. Then he bent over her and said, in a voice of quite human solicitude:

"I'm—perhaps you didn't realize. Look here—I wish I hadn't said all that! I'm—please don't cry!"

"I'm not crying," replied Olive, in a stifled voice. "Please forgive me! It really isn't funny, but—oh, oh, I just can't help it!"

He bent nearer.

"Are you laughing?" he demanded incredulously.

"Oh, please forgive me! It's horrible, but—I'll stop in a moment. You see, that awful story is Miss Torrance's, but I wrote a story, too—only mine was better, I think, and funnier. You see, we both—"

"You and Miss Torrance each wrote a story about Robertson?"

"Yes, both of us, and neither of us knew. Oh, imagine the editors, and Miss Torrance, and poor Mr. Robertson, and you, and me—"

"Personally, I don't see anything—" he began in a frigid tone, but it was of no use.

The dull, dingy old house rang with his great, hearty laugh.

VI

THEY were all having dinner together in a restaurant. In the circumstances, Miss Torrance could not well refuse, especially as it was Mr. Martin's one night on shore; but she was not happy. Every one else was happy, but not she.

As a rule, she strong-mindedly concealed her feelings, but to-night she didn't. She allowed Mr. Robertson to see just how miserable she was. Olive and Mr. Martin might have seen this, too, if they had looked at her.

"It looks as if there was a new story beginning there," observed Mr. Robertson. "Might be called 'Mr. Martin Swallows the Anchor.'"

Miss Torrance refused to smile.

"I shall miss Olive so," she said, in a not very steady voice, "if she—"

"I'm sure you would," agreed Mr. Robertson; "but she couldn't find a better fellow than young Martin. I've known him all his life, and—"

"Yes, I know," said Miss Torrance; "but I shall be lonely—oh, so lonely!"

It turned out, however, that she was not destined to be lonely.

THE BORED

I've seen the bored go up and down the world
These many years, while morning stood, dew-pearled
For its brief time, while day went on apace,
Yet always showed to me a various face;

Nor has the eve been onerous, with one star
At first, set over sunset's crimson bar,
Nor night with her great moon, her height on height
Of stars and worlds, infinite on infinite.

Cities and people, lands, great seas between,
Ships carrying brave flags at the topmost mast,
Processions making wonder as they passed—
Ten thousand things of marvel I have seen;

Forever finding, wherever I have trod,
This earth, this life, a wonder show of God!
Bored, in a universe with glamour stored!
Yes, by the fool who tells me he is bored!

Harry Kemp

Immortality

SHOWING THAT YOUTH, AS WELL AS BEAUTY, MAY BE IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

By Mella Russell McCallum

"IT would be rough on Lulie, of course, but she really ought to release Geoff Halleck."

The woman who was being discussed stopped short on her way down the Dorians' stairs. She had dropped in at Maud Dorian's at the tea hour. The maid had admitted her, had taken her upstairs, and had informed her that Mrs. Dorian was in the library with two friends.

"Not an invited tea, is it?" she had asked in some alarm.

"Oh, no, ma'am, Miss Lulie—they just happened in like yourself, I'm pretty sure."

So she had powdered and fluffed a bit before Maud's generous mirror. She had been glad she came, and had run lightly down the stairs—until she overheard Judith Lane's remark.

"Poor Lulie! I always say it's a tragedy to be born an ash blonde. They fade so terribly!"

Lulie recognized Marian Hamilton's voice.

"Oh, come now, let's not talk about Lulie!" The hostess spoke up with a little heat. "Lulie's a peach. They don't make 'em any sweeter than Lulie."

"Of course she's a peach," agreed Judith Lane; "but, peach or no peach, it's not right to keep a perfectly normal man from a normal life. If she doesn't intend to marry him herself, she ought to let some one else have him."

Lulie, on the stairs, could feel the shocked silence that followed; but the speaker continued obliviously.

"There must be some reason for his loyalty that we don't understand. Men aren't naturally such faithful creatures; or else it's just pure heroism."

Maud Dorian's heat increased.

"You may not mean to talk like a rot-

ter, Judith, but you can't say such things about Julie here!"

The woman on the stairs was weak from the swift gamut of emotion. So that was the way people were talking about her engagement to Geoff!

She considered flight; but it would be practically impossible for her to go back upstairs after her wraps without being seen, and she belonged to a class who simply do not run wildly out of houses in February without their hats on.

Under the stairs, she knew, there was a small closet with a dressing table. She entered it, switched on the light, and looked at herself in the mirror. This time she looked sharply. She saw large, light blue eyes; light hair, beautifully waved, but with no luster; a mouth not too wide for merry eighteen, but a little too wide for thirty-five; a rather large nose, slightly turned up.

She fumbled at the blue and gold vanity bag of Chinese embroidery that hung from her wrist, and applied more powder. The bag was Geoff's latest gift—an absurd youthful trifle that had caught his eye.

Homely—faded—she knew it. She had always known it. Faultless grooming—oh, yes! Perfectly fitting blue crape gown, but no vividness, no sparkle.

As noisily as she dared she made her way back to the group around the wood fire. Maud Dorian welcomed her warmly. So did the others, for that matter; but it was not a pleasant hour, in spite of tea and cakes and laughter.

At dinner her parents asked her if she wouldn't like to run down to the first performance at the Pickford. Her father liked picture shows. They suggested that it would help her to pass the time, since Geoff was out of town.

She declined. She saw her mother eying her sharply. She had never been able to fool her mother; but she couldn't talk about this—not yet.

Up in the delicately appointed room, which was like herself, she sat down well away from the mirror. Mirrors! She had had enough of mirrors for one day!

It was not the first time she had asked herself what Geoff could see in her. All homely women ask some such question, wonderingly; but they seldom try to answer it seriously. Why should they question the devotion of a man?

To-night Lulie tried to answer the question seriously.

Queer about the years! Geoff at thirty-eight was more handsome than Geoff at twenty-eight. His black hair was not graying flatly, but, instead, certain locks had become quite white. People said that it made him look interesting—as if he had a secret sorrow! Exercise had kept his splendid body hard and straight. His skin glowed, and his eyes were the sort described as “kindling.”

Lulie had always been proud of Geoff's increasing good looks. She had always been proud of the way a fresh enthusiasm made flames in his eyes. He was always having new enthusiasms, like a small boy. He didn't know it himself, but his firm knew it—and capitalized it. He was strangely successful with seemingly impossible undertakings.

But fifteen years engaged was a long time! Probably, in the last analysis, there was no excuse for it. Still, it was hard to criticize a man for being too good to his mother. Mrs. Halleck, a militant invalid, had always received homage from her only son. She had never forgiven him for falling in love with a Roman Catholic; and since Lulie had never had the slightest intention of renouncing her religion, there the matter had stuck for fifteen years.

At the first Geoff had said:

“I think we'd better wait, dearest. You wouldn't be happy in our house, I'm afraid, and how can I leave my mother when she's ill?”

That had seemed reasonable, and best. It still seemed best.

She might have gone to the Halleck house, of course, but she had doubted the ability of her teeth to stay gritted. Geoff might have left his mother and taken his bride away. Probably that is what he

should have done, she considered to-night; but that would not have been like Geoff!

And now people were talking, and saying she must have some secret hold upon him—or, if not, that his devotion was pure heroism.

She could not help smiling at the idea of a secret hold. Had she been of the mild blackmailing type, she could not have thought of a peg to hang it on. So far as she knew, Geoff led a blameless life.

But heroism—that hurt! No woman wants a man to stick just because he has given his word; and yet—and yet, if Geoff Halleck did stop loving a woman, that was exactly what he would do. Geoff was old-fashioned socially. He believed in lying like a gentleman.

Lulie could keep away from the mirror no longer. Gripping the edge of the glass-topped dressing table, she stared and stared.

“Oh, you idiot!” The words came up with a strangling sob. “Of course he doesn't love you any more!”

She began to pace about, her arms locked, her head forward.

“But I'm not keeping him from a normal life. He's stayed of his own free will,” pleaded the defense.

“He's too fine and loyal to hurt you, and you're so stupid that you had to have a load of bricks fall on you before you got it. Do you want a duty fiancé?”

“No—no—no!” went down the defense.

But because she was a well balanced person with a horror of the hysterical, she decided to defer definite decision for a time. Geoff would not get home for five days.

During that time she went about as usual. Her mother queried mutely, but she could not unburden herself. She must let no one influence her in this.

She added two and two over and over, but she could never get any answer except four. She *was* a washed-out-looking thing! She *was* a well groomed shadow! No normal man could possibly fall in love with her now. No normal man could possibly *be* in love with her now. She would release him!

II

THE night Geoff came she knew she looked ghastly. She had dipped freely into cosmetics and then rubbed them all off.

Geoff strode past the maid and into the parlor, where she was, before he took off

his overcoat. He took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Well, I got the order, Lulie! Old Wicks and Peterson have both dropped off ten years!"

Lulie stood still, watching him as he went back to the hall, throwing off his overcoat impatiently. His back looked young.

"Maybe they weren't surprised at my turning the trick! There ought to be something special in this for you and me, Lulie!"

She smiled. He always included her as joint beneficiary in any luck that came his way, just as if they were married.

"You should have just seen those hard-boiled eggs I had to tackle! Honestly, Lulie, they had no more intention of letting a contract to Wicks & Peterson than you have!"

He slapped his thighs, chuckled, and began to roam about the room. There was a tinkle of fragile objects on mantel and in cabinet as he walked.

"How have you been, Lulie?" he demanded suddenly.

"Oh, all right."

"Been gay, I hope?"

"Not such a lot, Geoff."

"See here, now, I told you not to mope when I'm gone. Get out—give other men a chance to dance with you. I'll bet you didn't go to the Leytons' party!"

He was frowning mightily. Here was the ideal opening.

"Geoff, listen. Do you think I don't know how anxious men are to dance with faded spinsters?"

He halted suddenly, and the fragile objects stopped tinkling.

"What rot! If there's any one any prettier—"

A trickle of laughter interrupted him.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," he informed her loftily.

Oh, dear, what a bad start! She had intended to be clever and subtle, to lay a net. She would wait for another chance.

"How's your mother, Geoff?"

"About as usual, thanks. She sent her love to you."

Geoff sat down, and his body relaxed. He looked suddenly tired. There was something else, too, in his face—a kind of uncomprehendingness.

"If you only had your own home to come back to, after these hard trips!"

She started. She had not intended to say that. Evidently she was too full of her subject. It came bubbling up of its own accord.

The man went white. What she had said was a breach of code. They had agreed long ago not to salt wounds.

"I don't mean—what you think," she corrected. "I mean—it's not too late for you to—have a wife to come back to."

"What do you mean, Lulie?"

"You are still young. You can marry—almost any one."

He jerked himself in his chair.

"Are you losing your mind?"

She flung up her head then.

"No—finding it."

She felt dull pink coming into her face. She never blushed becomingly. Blushing bloated her skin slightly.

He stared angrily.

"Geoff, dear, I mean—I want you to stop pretending. I know it's all very fine and chivalrous, but you've been acting long enough."

"Acting?"

The dull pink was burning her. He was more clever than she had dreamed; and only six days ago she would have believed him!

"You're making it very hard for me, Geoff. Why don't you admit that you no longer care?"

"Admit? Care? Care about what? Is this a joke, or melodrama?" He pulled his chair near hers, and took hold of her hand hard. "Now tell me in plain English what you're driving at!"

She pulled, but he kept the hands. He was looking at them.

"I love your hands, Lulie," he said suddenly. "They're like white birds."

"Yes, white, starved old birds—with raised veins, and crisscrossings all over!"

"Lulie, for God's sake—"

"Geoff, look at me!"

"My dear girl, I am looking!"

"Well, then, you must see. I want to release you."

He dropped her hands then, and jumped up. The tinkling in the room began again.

Lulie felt as if she was dying; yet it was a relief. That much was done, the mask pierced. He had been clever in his old-fashioned chivalry, but she had got under the skin at last. The rest would be easier. From now on it would be a mere adjustment to reality.

A wild wish rolled over her fainting mind. Why had she done this? Why had she not let well enough alone? Never to have known—blindness were paradise!

But there was no going back now. It was too late! She had pierced and bludgeoned away the mask, and found the truth. Geoff was pacing up and down the room fiercely. That in itself was a damning admission.

She closed her eyes. She was cold, as if wrapped in a cold shawl—a shroud. She was going to keep on getting colder and colder as the years went on—more faded, with more crisscrossings on her skin.

Plump! The vases rocked, then were silent. Lulie opened her eyes. Geoff was on his knees beside her. He looked rather ridiculous. His arms came up around her. His face was in her lap.

She was physically unable not to touch the black hair with the interesting streaks.

"Lulie—Lulie, love!"

Her heart leaped; but those women had said—and the mirror said—

"It isn't very flattering of you, Geoff, to keep on this way. Do you think I can't face the truth?"

"It isn't very flattering of you, either, to start doubting me when I'm away. Is it? Is it, now?"

She did not reply. He climbed heavily to his feet, and went out into the hall. He was taking down his overcoat.

"Geoff!"

He was back. He lifted her face to the light and cupped it in his hands.

"What do you see?" she whispered.

"You, dearest—the prettiest thing on earth, to me!"

His voice sounded hurt, like one who suffers from a child's thoughtless tongue.

"But the gray in my hair—and the wrinkles—and the drawn look—"

One of his arms dropped to her shoulder. With the other he pulled her close.

"There is a little gray in your hair, I admit. Why not? It serves to soften it. It used to be almost too bright. I don't see any wrinkles, or any drawn look. Lines of experience, yes—do you think I want you a blank-faced flapper?"

An awe, a solemnity, shook Lulie.

"Stop trembling—my beautiful!"

Then Lulie gave up. He was shaking her gently.

"Have you chuckled the nonsense?"

"Yes, Geoff!"

"Will you always believe in me?"

"Yes, Geoff!"

"What made you do it, anyway?"

"I don't know."

He growled contentedly.

III

LATER, in her room, she looked again at the woman in the mirror. She tried to see what Geoff saw; but—what did he see?

Rummaging in a drawer, she found a picture of herself at twenty. Rather pretty, then—fluffy hair, merry mouth, and youth—youth.

She undressed somberly. She was still shaken by the wonder of it. She would never understand, but she would never question. How small she had been, listening to gossip! She didn't deserve this—this wonderful gift!

For a long time she sat on the edge of her bed, smiling faintly.

A DESERT LOVE SONG

THE distant hills wear now the orchid tinting
The western sunset brings at eventide;
Bear to him, evening breezes, without stinting,
The love and trust that in my heart abide!

Soon cactus and mesquite will dream securely
Beneath the brooding of the desert moon;
Oh, carry to him, breezes, swiftly, surely,
The hope our parting will be ended soon!

The mocking bird is passionately singing
Unto his mate of love eternally;
Oh, gentle desert breezes, are you bringing
Eternal love from my mate back to me?

Nancy Richey Ranson

Wide Waters

A STORY OF SEA AND SHORE AND SHIPS AND SAILORMEN

By Captain Dingle

Author of "The Age-Old Kingdom," "Three Palms Cay," etc.

XXI

"OH, Jake, don't start more trouble!" pleaded Mary, and the eyes which she raised to his astonished face were brimming over.

"What do you care?" retorted Stevens, with a bitter laugh. "You want to see that dude walk hobnailed over me, don't you? Well, he can go to hell, just as I told him!"

"I care more than you think, Jake," she persevered. "And you didn't tell him to go to hell when he almost got clubbed to death dragging you out of that drunken fight in Cape Town!" Her eyes were big and dark and angry now, and she met his gaze directly. "If you're half the man you say you are, you'll be at the captain's door with your apology at six bells," she said.

She turned and left him.

Stevens stood gazing after her moodily, angry at her interference; but at least she had called him Jake again. Moreover, she had told him that she cared more than he knew, and had looked straight into his eyes as she said it.

He shook his head, and muttered for half an hour; but at six bells he knocked on Drake's door, cap in hand.

Mary spent a lot of time over her toilet that evening. She went in to supper dressed as if for a gay party, and she forced an air of gayety so natural that it deceived even Alden Drake. It soothed the simmering rage of Jake Stevens. She was the only bright influence in the ship. She was in much the same situation as an actress who plays with all her soul in her art to avert a panic in the audience.

She spent a brief moment with Stevens

under the dark, rushing skies that had come with the wind, and much of his anger was laid to sleep. When she left the deck and joined Drake in the saloon, the faint, enchanting perfume of her clung to Stevens like an aura of peace.

But the sound of the voices in the saloon revived bad memories. Jake Stevens was only partly soothed. Drake, too, while thrilled by her sparkling vivacity, resented the few moments she had spent on deck. He did not care to go up and irritate Stevens so soon. He knew quite well what it must have cost the mate to make that grumbling apology. Neither did he wish to dull Mary's good spirits; yet she ought to know that he did not like her to break his rule about speaking to the mate while on watch.

"Mary," he started to say, "you should not—"

"Oh, just a minute!" she interrupted, springing up and running to her cabin.

She almost shrieked when he began to speak. She dreaded to let him begin scolding. Her nerves would never stand it.

While digging into her trunk for pretty clothes to wear at supper, she had taken out a Mah Jong set purchased in Cape Town. It had never been used, and she had almost forgotten she had it; but the sight of it reminded her that it might well serve a good turn, and she had laid it on her bunk. Now, through sheer necessity, to stop the reprimand that was on Drake's lips, she flew to the game as to a refuge from something terrible.

"You reminded me of this, Alden," she said, smiling gayly, as she rejoined him at the table. "I was asking Jake about it. I know he has played the game." That was a fib, but she considered it only a little white one. It was entirely justifiable.

"Shall we play? I've simply got to do something new."

So they played at playing a game which neither knew, and which Jake Stevens knew still less, for as a matter of fact he had never heard of it. Such a muddle they made of it! But it diverted their thoughts. It brought them close together as they studied the rules; and the warmth of her, the sensuous fragrance of her hair and living flesh, the touch, the very nearness of her, carried Alden Drake back to the realms of human affections. The sea, the speeding clipper, the heaviness of portent that had settled upon all on board of the *Orontes*, vanished like a miasma.

For half an hour Mary allowed her thoughts to carry her in the same direction. She forgot everything except the one great absorbing fact that the woman in her cried out to the man in him. There was a celestial harmony even in the deep silence that stole over them.

The ivory pieces lay scattered over the crimson tablecloth like leaves from a dead tree. Mary's eyes were misty and dark when Drake kissed her good night. Her red lips quivered, moistly warm. Yet there was a trace of emptiness in her heart when her door was shut. She rubbed her lips, looked doubtfully at her reflection in her mirror, and gazed long and intently into her own eyes. She shook her head. Long after she should have slept, she lay with wide eyes staring up at the gliding lamp shadows on the deckhead.

"He kisses me as if I were a wax doll," she whispered. "He hasn't a spark of feeling in him! If he had been like that in the taxicab coming home from Rondebosch—oh!"

He had not been like that coming home from Rondebosch. The memory of that night set her all aglow. She fell asleep with a rosy color on her face and a smile that looked like a kiss itself on her lips.

Jake Stevens got a lot of holystoning done while the hard, true breeze hung steady in the south, driving the ship fast along her course. The wearisome hauling on sheets and braces that always came with variable winds, and the heartbreaking "Stand by!" "Let go!" "Hoist away again!" of the squally days were gladly missed. Even the back breaking holystoning was welcome after those days.

There was no time for fighting. When

a man had done twelve hours on his knees, up to his eyes in wood pulp slime, rubbing wet planks with a square brick under the hawk-eyed criticism of an insatiable officer—or two officers, or even three—he was willing to eat his salt horse and duff and pantiles with no more sound than the grinding of his own teeth. A shipmate might call him out of his name with more or less impunity then, if the shipmate had breath to spare. Let the weary one once tumble into his blanket, with good stout plug tobacco sizzling under his nose, and the name could scarcely be coined that would bring him to his feet in anger.

With all three mates on deck all day, an apprentice at the easy helm, and Captain Drake standing a watch to expedite the work, the portentous air that had oppressed the ship and her people seemed to have passed away. Mary resumed her fancy work on the sheepskin. Again she found something comical in the antics of the boys. Young Mr. Adams once more hummed a song in the night watches.

Even the steady rush of the welcome breeze, however, did not blow away the perfect politeness that had become the established relation between Captain Drake and his first mate. Try as she might, Mary could not keep her mind away from that outward show of friendship, which she still feared. She felt sure that it was but the shining cloak covering an evil thing. It was the one thing, so far as she saw, that kept real peace from the ship.

Off watch, Jake Stevens often chatted with her in lightsome humor. That was enough to make her afraid. She had known Jake for a long time. She had seen him grim, and rough, and masterly, cruel at times, but scarcely humorous, save in a heavy, obvious way. Now he found something to laugh at in almost everything, and his laugh was not a thing of joy. Nevertheless, she could not definitely put her finger upon any one spot that marred the sincerity of his cordiality.

Jake had shown her how to work a silk fringe all around the sheepskin. She had seen the same sort of thing, in canvas threads, on Drake's sea chest. Now she wished that Alden had showed her how to do it; but Jake had thought of it, and the captain had not. Consequently, Jake felt it only due to him that he should be permitted to watch over the progress of the work.

He stood beside her on the poop one dog watch. The day's work was done, and holystones and squeegees were put away. The sun still lingered above the horizon, for the ship was well up toward the equator again, eating up the miles before the strong, fair breeze. It was the only hour when relaxation was permitted to officer or man until the holystoning was done.

Drake had kept the deck all day. He was now working up a late afternoon longitude sight. Mr. Twining had the watch, and the big ship sped swiftly through long, easy seas without labor, gently leaning, gently swinging, flinging flashing sprays in sport high at her bows.

"Mary, I've wanted to talk with you a long time now," said Jake Stevens, with something like awkwardness in his manner.

She glanced up at his face apprehensively. His big, powerful hands picked at the sheepskin in her hands. His rugged, red face was twisted with some intense emotion. She could not feel exactly afraid of him. She felt, rather, as if something entirely new and not precisely pleasant was about to burst over her head.

"Why, Jake, I'm always glad to talk to you," she smiled, turning a bold face upon the problem. "What is it? Something on your mind? Not been having words with Captain Drake?"

"Damn and blast Captain Drake!" he spat out fiercely.

She shrank back into her chair, and he softened amazingly, laying a hand as light as a child's on her shoulder, his blue eyes darkening with apology.

"Forgive that, Mary! It isn't easy for me to hear you speak his name. I want you to tell me something. How long have we been friends?"

"Oh, ages!" cried Mary, looking up sharply at his tone.

The expression on his face went straight to her heart. She had never expected to see big Jake Stevens look like that in the presence of any human being.

"How long?" he repeated.

"Since I was ten years old, isn't it? I know I was a mite of a kid when you joined the Orontes, Jake."

"Ten years! Ten years! How long have you known this man Alden Drake?"

"Why, Jake!"

"How long?" he insisted.

"I can't say exactly."

"Well, you've known him ten weeks. Thereabouts, anyway."

She wondered what he was driving at. As secretly as possible she tried to detect signs or odors of liquor. Every minute she grew more uneasy. She could most vividly recall that terrific moment not so long gone by, when she awoke to find herself in his fierce embrace, and her lips crushed against his vinous mouth.

Involuntarily she glanced around, to assure herself of the presence of help, should she need it. Mr. Twining stood beside the wheel, giving the newest apprentice a lesson in helmsmanship. She did not feel so utterly deserted. She knew that Drake was at his desk, just beneath one of those open skylights a little abaft the companion-way. She was safe.

She could detect no trace of liquor. She could afford to smile up at Jake, brightly inquisitive.

"Well?"

He grew more ill at ease. His feet shifted, and his big hands crumpled up the fleecy sheepskin until she wanted to scream at him. He muttered as if the words stuck. Then, with a rush, he said:

"You kissed that miner chap on the Green Point Road!"

The surprise of it left her staring at him with lips parted and blue eyes at their widest. Something in her face must have comforted him, for he smiled. It was an amazing, fleeting, spasmodic effort of a smile, but a smile, nevertheless. Bewildered though she was at the apparently irrelevant turn of his talk, she was obliged to smile back at him, in very relief that he had smiled.

"What are you wandering back there for, Jake?" she retorted.

"What did you do it for?"

"Really, I don't know. Impulse, perhaps. I felt glad that horrid fight was over and you were all safe."

"I'll tell you," said Jake, and the smile hovered over him again, uncertainly now, declining to settle. "You said you kissed him because he had saved the life of the man you—and then you stopped; but you meant the man you loved, didn't you, Mary?"

Her eyes fell before his dark, passionate gaze. There was a wistful note in his voice, too, which saddened her. She knew well enough what was coming next.

"Did you mean me, Mary, or did you mean—"

Blushing furiously, Mary sprang from her chair, hurling her work broadcast over

the deck, and ran below, leaving Jake Stevens there, with his question unanswered, yet answered plainly enough. He picked up her work basket and the sheepskin, put them upon the deck chair, and his features writhed fearfully. His breath whistled through his teeth. He felt murderous.

The ship swam forward in peace, and into the peace Jake's stormy temper hurled dark discord.

"Call all hands!" he roared. "You, boy! Call the boson! Tell him to turn out all hands and sweat up everything all around the ship! Get a move on!"

A faint strain of music ceased far forward. Old Bill Gadgett groaned as he turned out. He knew that the order was unnecessary. The men growled as they rolled out of the forecabin to make the dreary round of hauling and swinging upon halyards, sheets, and braces, uselessly spending their strength to freshen the nip on gear already at perfect strain.

Men who had forgotten their quarrels jostled one another. Rivals who had buried their grievances cursed one another and looked black. Chips, to do his share of the useless labor, took a top maul and whacked at wedges already so firmly home in the batten cleats of the hatches that another whack threatened to split them. The doctor, watching Chips fearfully, scuttled forward and began to sharpen his meat cleaver on the forecabin grindstone.

XXII

ONE man's turbulent passions shattered the peace of thirty human beings. If the sailors of the *Orontes* thought they had been worked up before, they soon felt that all that had gone by had been nothing but a pleasure cruise.

Jake's first outburst might have spent itself in one flurry; but when he faced Mary across the breakfast table, the morning after his abrupt question, he saw undisguised fear in her eyes. It sent him from the table before he had eaten a full man's meal, gritting his teeth, nursing black spleen that was destined to vomit itself forth upon the unlucky crew.

"There ain't no call to bullydamn us like this, Mr. Stevens!" fat little Joe Bunting told him one blazing forenoon, when Madagascar loomed blue through the shimmering haze.

Joe had just finished a boy's job, far aloft, slushing down the main skysail pole

and royal mast. It was near noon, and at ten o'clock he had gone straight from the wheel to the slushing job without the five-minute smoke which was the relieved helmsman's immemorial privilege. He knew that eight bells would strike before he had got halfway up to his next job of slushing down the fore.

"Are you giving me slack?" snarled Stevens. "Are you giving me back chat, you useless lump o' lard?"

"Don't call me out o' me name, sir," returned Joe fearlessly. "I ain't givin' yer no slack. It's nigh eight—"

"I'll show you!" gritted Jake, and knocked little roly-poly Joe headlong with a cruelly unexpected punch on the ear.

Joe scrambled to his feet, blood trickling from his ear, his twinkling eyes cold and starry.

Drake was taking a noon sight on the poop, with Mr. Twining taking another for a check from the monkey bridge. Drake happened to remove his sextant from his eye for a rest, the sun still being short of meridian, and saw Joe confront Stevens. There was something about the little seaman which warned Drake that all was not well. He laid down his sextant, and walked forward along the monkey bridge.

"Mr. Stevens, you 'it me," wheezed Joe simply. "I'm a habble seaman, sir, and I give yer no lip. I don't allow no man to 'it me for nothink. 'It me again, sir, please! I'll pay yer out fer two in one. Come on, now—you started it!"

Jake Stevens was quite willing. The loitering seamen, glad of any chance to stop work, stole nearer. Since the working up had begun, the foremast hands had again split up into two rival parties. Though none might exactly love Jake Stevens, there was an element which hated Joe Bunting at any time.

"I 'ope 'e 'ammers 'im 'elpless, blimy I do!" muttered young Tubbs.

"Ar-rh! The fat leetle swab ees too cocky!" growled Tony.

"I'll talk ter you arterwards, me son!" said Joe grimly, waiting for the mate to take up his challenge.

Jake grinned like a snarling dog, leaning forward in a crouch, his great hands clenching and unclenching until the bones crackled. Slowly he reached out until the claw-like fingers of his left hand were almost at Joe's neck. His right fist drew back to strike.

Joe watched the approaching claw out of a corner of one eye, but he evinced no fear. Rather, he looked as if he welcomed the chance to take a good, solid wallop at that terrifying face. He heard men all about him giving voice to their hopes in low, hoarse tones, and many were unfriendly to him; but he only grinned. He hoped the mate would not be too long getting started. It was almost eight bells.

"That will do, Mr. Stevens—you may go aft! You, Bunting, get for'ard at once!" said a clear, level voice, as Drake leaped from the monkey bridge to the fore hatch, and thence to the deck between the belligerents.

"He's a mutinous dog!" snarled Stevens. "He wants flaking!"

"That will do. I want no flaking done on this ship, Mr. Stevens. Go aft!" returned Drake.

The mate turned aft, muttering. The seamen dispersed, grumbling, for they felt they had been robbed of an interesting piece of sport.

"Hee ees a lucky steef!" snarled Tony, regarding Joe evilly.

Joe shoved Tubbs aside, and wheezed so that all might hear, if they chose:

"Ye're a dirty rat! I'm goin' ter knock seven bells out o' you soon's we git below!"

"Ar-rh! You knock seven bells out o' your dinner, you fat peeg!" retorted Tony, who felt courageous, for most of the nearby seamen were with him, he knew.

Joe made no further reply. Eight bells struck, the watches were changed, and the men who had been cheated of their sport went to dinner.

If relations between Captain Drake and Stevens had been strained before, the tension was at breaking point when Drake had delivered himself of a short lecture on the subject of bullying seamen. Dinner was a horrible ordeal to Mary. Drake spoke to her in monosyllables. He was far more polite to Jake Stevens. As soon as she could she ran on deck, oppressed again with the vague sense of a weight hanging over her, ready to crush her.

That feeling settled all over the ship again. The fresh breezes had deserted the ship. She swam sluggishly through tropic seas under a burning sun that forbade comfort.

There had been a brief uproar in the fore-castle after dinner. Loud voices and

swarming figures in the doorway took young Mr. Adams at a run, for Drake had laid down the dictum that he would stand for no disorder. Mary watched the disturbance, quivering with nervous fear. She saw Adams return aft, and the fore-castle settled into quiet. Joe Bunting brought out a blanket, stretched it over the forestay as an awning, and dozed away his afternoon watch below there.

"All hands want to fight," said Mr. Adams, as he climbed the poop ladder. "It's darned queer, how everything seems sort of touch and go lately! Even the wind seems contrary, doesn't it?"

"I wish we were through the Straits of Sunda!" Mary cried sharply. "I don't wonder the men feel like fighting. I feel like that, too!"

Captain Drake himself had stepped in and told Stevens to stop working up the men in the hot weather. When Jake resented the interference, Drake smilingly stood on his privilege as owner. Stevens had no retort to that; so the watches were regularly kept again, and there was no more unnecessary all-day working up. In fact, men were scarcely worked at all during the afternoon, except on absolutely essential ship's work.

There ought to have been the most utter serenity on board; but there was still that infernal politeness between the captain and the mate. Mr. Twining and young Adams were in perfect harmony, and accordingly they were as pleasantly abusive of each other as a congenial pair of junior officers can be. The apprentices, too, enjoyed life to the top of their bent; for since the *Orontes* left Table Bay they had been full fed and easily worked. The mate had never been permitted to tickle them with a rope end. Even Mr. Twining had done that, when he was mate, and they had expected much sterner treatment under Mr. Stevens; so they were full of beans and boyishly content with their lot.

Yet even they felt the sense of oppressiveness. No matter who it was, let any man once come within the sphere of that devilish politeness existing between skipper and mate, and good-by to serenity, farewell to contentment.

Strangely, perhaps, Mary blamed Drake entirely. As she sat moodily in her deck chair, too restless to work at anything, too rebellious to read, she felt a warm sense of sympathy for Jake Stevens stealing over

her. He was a he-man, anyhow, she told herself fiercely.

He had been captain. He had once directed the destinies of the ship and all her people. He might have been a bit rougher than Drake, a bit less polished in manner, but he had governed his ship efficiently. There had been no such atmosphere of strife as had reigned since leaving the Cape.

Truth was, Mary was femininely angry at Drake. He was the tardy male, and the shyest of girls despises a tardy wooer.

On the night after the trouble with Joe Bunting, Mary was restless, and could not sleep. She slipped a warm robe about her to stand off the heavy tropic dew, and went on deck. She did not go outside the open companionway, but stood there in the shadow, gazing out across the softly heaving sea, which lay like a gem-smothered carpet of purple satin under the glittering heavens.

Stevens was on watch. His big, powerful figure paced fore and aft on feet light as a girl's. His head was sunk between his shoulders, except at each turn, when he raised his eyes to sweep the ship and sea with a sailorly glance.

Suddenly there came a commotion of men in the black shadows of the waist. Curses stabbed the still air like metal. The mate ran to the rail, bawling down for silence. Mary half emerged, glad of anything that promised to break the awful heaviness that hung over all.

"I keel you, you cockney peeg!" shrilled the voice of Tony Fernando.

"Yus, you won't! Blimy, just you wait!" screamed Herbert Oates in ratlike fury.

"'Ere, shut yer bleedin' row!" wheezed Joe Bunting.

Mr. Stevens leaped down the ladder and plunged headlong into the unseen quarrel. Mary stepped from her shelter and hung over the poop rail, starry-eyed with excitement. The time-keeping apprentice appeared from his own hiding place and stood beside her.

"Somebody's going to catch hob!" he grinned.

"Hush!" whispered Mary.

Then she stifled a scream. From the scuffle of feet and the uproar of voices in the darkness there came the sound of blows and then a horrible, sobbing shriek.

"Holy Mother!"

It sounded like Tony's voice. There was another voice, like no man's, but like the snarl of a tortured cat.

"'Ere! 'Ands off!" yelled Joe Bunting.

Then the mate uttered a splitting curse that was cut short midway and died in a fearful grunting groan; and as abruptly as the row started, it died to silence.

"My cripes! There's something up!" gasped the apprentice, and stood irresolutely at the ladder head.

To the rail glided Drake, awakened by the breaking of the night's peace.

"What is it?" he demanded.

He glanced around, saw no officer, and gripped the boy's arm. The apprentice choked down his fright, but could only point.

Drake ran down the ladder. Soon he shouted for lanterns. The rest of the watch ran up; then the sleepers awoke and swarmed around in the lantern glow. Mary stared down from the poop and felt as if she were on the edge of an inferno, looking in.

A deathly silence hung over the circle of illumination. In it, on the deck which was queerly streaked with glistening fluid, Tony lay dead, his hands clutching at his breast. Beside him Jake Stevens knelt, slowly toppling over, blood staining his white jacket at the breast.

Joe Bunting half knelt beside both men. In his hand was a dripping knife, in his round gray eyes horror. Men crowded around. The doctor hung on the edge of the circle, chattering with fear, holding a gleaming cleaver in one palsied hand. The other hand was outstretched, talonwise, toward Joe.

"'E done it, captain! It was 'im—'im with the knife!"

XXIII

THROUGH the saloon they carried Jake Stevens to his own berth. Mary followed, white and silent. She wanted to scream, to raise the vault of heaven with her screaming; but she was tongue-tied with horror. Ike Saintly hovered near, wringing his hands, useless, pallid. The seamen who laid the mate in his bunk trooped stolidly out again.

"Where shall I put Bunting, sir?" the second mate asked of Drake, coming into the saloon after the bearers.

"Ironed him?" snapped Drake.

The second mate nodded.

"Put him in the sail locker for the present. He didn't do this dirty business. I can't believe it!"

"He was heard threatening Tony, sir, and Mr. Stevens knocked him—"

"Never mind. Put him in the sail locker until morning. Is the dago dead?"

"Cold, sir. Is—is—Mr. Stevens—"

"Can't say. Get about your business now. Steward! Where in blazes is that steward?"

"He's getting hot water," Mary called out quietly from the mate's berth. Already she had opened the wounded man's shirt and bared the ugly knife stab. "I'll take charge here, Alden. Just let me have Ike awhile."

"That looks nasty," the skipper muttered, scrutinizing the deep wound in Jake's hairy breast. "I can't understand it. Joe Bunting never did that, I'm sure!"

"Don't try to understand it!" Mary flashed impatiently. She had become the complete sick room angel in no more time than it might have taken her to throw off her kimono had she gone back to bed. She was swabbing the cut with a piece of her nightdress dipped in cold water, while waiting for Ike and his kettle. There was a fuzz of wiry hair around it. She looked about the little cabin.

"Can you shave this for me, Alden?" she demanded.

Drake got scissors and razor, and smoothed the mate's brawny chest, while Mary looked on, irritated at his slowness. Ike stood by with the ship's medicine chest and a kettle of hot water.

"Now get out, please!"

In half an hour Mary fixed the last strap of adhesive tape to the pad covering the clean wound. Stevens had not opened his eyes. While she irrigated the wound with biting antiseptic, and bravely drove stitches through the flesh with a darning needle and silk from her fancy work, he had only shown that he lived by the fitful rise and fall of his breast and a single muffled groan.

"Bring me some brandy, Ike," she said presently.

Ike brought a whole bottle and a corkscrew, as if it were some priceless libation that he was offering to the goddess of miracles. With goggling eyes and a foolishly drooping underlip, he had watched Mary dress the mate's wound. Calling to mind many things that had happened aboard the ship since leaving home, he did not quite

understand her tender care for Jake Stevens; but that did not hinder his blind worship of her.

"Thanks! You can go now," she told him.

Ike went out like a sheep.

Mary watched by the bedside hour after hour. She forced brandy between Jake's lips at intervals, and was satisfied that he was slowly recovering vitality.

Drake looked in, received her report, and left her. He was conscious of a feeling of jealousy, but he put it from him as utterly unworthy. He knew that in her hands Stevens had every chance possible. There was already one dead man on his mind, and he did not want another.

While she waited for the closed eyes to open, Mary curiously examined the furnishings of the little cabin. It was just about the same size as her own stateroom, but what a difference in its decorations!

Her own little bedroom was as neat and tasteful as a fastidious girl could make it, adorned with little feminine touches as dainty as her own person or her clothes. Here, in the man's den, a blackened old pipe lay, vomiting its dead ashes, between the pages of an open book. The carpet was strewn with dead matches from an upset ash tray. There was a narrow, shelflike desk, littered with a "Nautical Almanac," an "Epitome of Navigation," and a part plug of tobacco; but—

She abruptly sat up straight. Then she leaned forward with a lively interest, very different to the idle curiosity that had carried her thus far.

There was just one clear, spotless space on that crowded desk. It was by the bulkhead. On it was a beautifully carved ivory frame—a gorgeous bit of oriental wizardry, worthy of a place in any museum of art. Such a thing was incongruous there, yet it seemed as if no other place could do justice to its worth.

In it was a picture—an amateur effort at photography, taken with an indifferent lens. In developing and printing, some of the initial blemishes had been further emphasized; but it was still a picture, wholly recognizable to Mary, for it was her own likeness, vivid for all its misfortunes of birth and development.

"Oh!" she breathed.

She looked swiftly at the unconscious Jake, as if afraid that his eyes might open and surprise her. He had not aroused.

She reached out to take the picture. It was cunningly fastened, secure against falling, but easy of removal for cleaning. And what cleaning! Nothing she possessed had ever received the care revealed by that intricate ivory carving. There was no speck of dust or discoloration anywhere to be detected, although there were a thousand tiny crevices and carved flower petals to catch a speck or stain. The silver edging inside the frame shone with a soft, pure luster. The glass over the photograph was not sullied by a single smear.

And the picture—just a wild, pigtailed, leggy flapper of a girl—a laughing, mischievous elf—a bubbling, happy, jolly-good-fellow sort of a kid laughing at the world and challenging it to play with her. Written across the bottom of the photograph was a queer, straggly, madcap wriggle of an inscription:

"Mary, with love to Jake." Below this came the date, and the place—"Batavia."

"Oh!" she breathed again, and her face was as red as Jake's port curtains.

As she replaced the frame, she glanced with real apprehension at his face. That picture—she remembered! She would never have remembered except by actually seeing it, however. She was twelve years old then, and Jake Stevens had not been long in her father's ship. She had a vague recollection of giving that silly snapshot to him, and of telling him that he was her first sweetheart.

Resentment was the first emotion that assailed her. Then—she could not help herself—she felt a deep, overpowering pity for the man lying stricken there, dependent for what small ease he had upon the care of her own hands. She must go out of that cabin. She had to let her nerves settle into their normal tranquillity again. If he should open his eyes, and see her as she looked then—as his mirror, with brutal candor, told her that she looked—she could never face him again.

Impulsively she flitted to the side of the bunk, stooped with the lightsome dart of a bird, and kissed him fairly between the closed eyes.

"Get well, Jake!" she whispered, and fled from the cabin.

As the door softly closed behind her, Jake Stevens's eyes opened slowly and followed her. They were dark with pain, those blue eyes—heavy with weakness, too; but there was a spark that glowed deep in

their depths which hinted that perhaps her lips had only hastened the flinging open of the fetters of sleep that prisoned his soul.

XXIV

FOR a full week the ship sailed swiftly on her course in a welcome atmosphere of peace. It took Jake Stevens a week to recover strength enough to use his legs. When he at last hauled himself stubbornly on deck, to take advantage of the sparkling air and warm sunlight, he seemed to be a changed man. He was quiet, and his eyes were not as hard as formerly.

Drake was frankly glad to see him about again. There was none of that devilish politeness between them. There was more of a frank attempt at understanding.

It was Mary who showed the deepest traces of the week of anxiety. Her color had paled, her lips were not so softly red. Her eyes held shifting lights which, had anybody very keenly watched them, would have suggested that the girl's mind was far from easy in the presence of her patient. When she had to meet his eyes and respond to the gentle smile with which he always greeted her, her color flooded back hotly for the instant of response, leaving her pale and colorless the moment after.

Stevens never spoke to her, except in the civil commonplaces of every day, but his eyes followed her about. Even Drake smilingly rallied her about her patient and his dumb devotion. That hurt. She had her bad moments without having to endure that. Drake had put down her seeming weariness to the effects of her long week of nursing. She had not spared herself, and everybody in the ship knew it. The men whispered her praises. Even the hotheads of the forecabin had a good word to say for her.

"You ought to try to brighten up, Mary—everything is so fine and pleasant again," Drake told her.

She did try, and at least managed to present a smiling face.

Joe Bunting had spent only one night in the sail locker. Next morning, when the time came for him to be questioned, all hands were mustered, and Herbert Oates was missing. Fat little Joe was facing his accusers bravely, fully alive to the gravity of the occasion; but he smiled a little when Herbert failed to respond to his name.

"'Erb an' Tony wuz allus yellin' murder," he remarked.

"Who said 'e'd knock seven bells out o' Tony?" yelled young Tubbs hotly.

"Yus, an' 'oo promised to git even with the mate?" said Sims.

"Silence!" Drake stopped every idle tongue. "Get to work and dig out Oates. Meanwhile, Bunting, if you give your parole, you need not remain ironed. Mr. Twining, I make it your business to find Oates. Until he's found, leave matters as they are. Mr. Stevens may have something to say when he recovers fully. Won't bother him now. Have Tony decently sewed up. I'll read him over the side to-night."

Tony had gone, but Herbert Oates remained unfound. Things forward swung back into their normal circle of watches. Only the greasy doctor remained unchanged. He slept in the galley, and never out of reach of a cleaver. Quiet old Chips shook his gray head about it, but it troubled him no more than that.

There came at last a day when Jake Stevens reported himself able to stand watch. That was the day that the ship was found to be within five hundred miles of Java Head. The breeze had carried her far and fast while Jake lay in his bunk below. Everything was in accord with the glorious sunshine and the poppling blue sea. The crew had been busy all the week, and the big ship shone like a jewel in fresh paint and burnished metal.

The very first result of the mate's appearance sent a thrill of relief around the ship, even among those of the crew who a week ago would have sworn away Joe Bunting's very life.

"Of course Bunting didn't knife anybody!" Stevens said testily. "I could have told you that long ago. It was that squeal-in' rat Herbert Oates. Better loose Bunting and clap the darbies on the right man. Bunting? Hell!"

Stevens had not entirely recovered on that first day on deck. Mary watched him keenly, for she still considered him her patient. When the breeze grew fitful toward mid afternoon, and the sun poured down its direct rays scaldingly, she persuaded Drake to have an awning spread over part of the poop, even though the spanker had to come in to make room for it. With the light breeze as it was, the ship did as well without that sail, anyhow; but Stevens

grinned ironically to see the concession made for him.

Then Mary made Ike carry up a small card table and some folding stools, and she placed Jake on a stool, with his back against the deck house companionway, as soon as his watch was up. Here she served his dinner to him. She would have taken her own dinner there but for Drake's mild remonstrance.

Afterward, when the breeze had died utterly, and the ship swung dully on a glassy sea, and that unutterable sense of evil portent threatened to lower over them all again, in sheer desperation she commanded Drake to go up with her and join Stevens for an hour.

"We'll play at Mah Jong," she said.

"Play *at* it will be about right," he smiled indulgently; but she wanted nothing more than a means of making them forget themselves and one another, if only for an hour.

"I cannot understand this feeling!" she cried, as she placed the box of ivory pieces on the table. "It's more like what I should imagine precedes an earthquake than anything I know. Haven't you noticed it, Jake?"

She had called him Jake ever since his mishap, and apparently Drake had not noticed it. If he had, he let it pass, knowing them to be old friends; but her pretty use of his name always brought a sparkle to Jake's deep-set eyes.

"Can't say I have," he grinned; "but I never remember makin' a voyage quite like this one before."

"Come, let's start the game!" said Drake impatiently.

He had felt the stress, and was not too well pleased with Mary for reminding them of it. He upset the box and scattered the pieces over the table. In silence they divided them around. Neither understood the game; each studied the rules with much wrinkling of brows. Perhaps they were glad of the excuse to avoid one another's eyes.

"Seems all about bamboos and the winds in 'em," Jake said, with a short laugh.

An innocent remark, but it cracked on their ears. There was little work going on about the decks. Some sailors helped Sails with his sewing on the fore hatch. Two boys played at helping Chips by dulling his planes on some boards. The helmsman whistled softly by the idle wheel. The offi-

cer of the watch tried his artistic hand with a small brush and some vivid red paint, writing the ship's name in a white ribbon on every varnished oaken bucket in the poop rack.

"Can't make head or stern of this game, Mary," grumbled Drake presently.

Even under the awning the heat was oppressive. The three people of necessity sat close together. As they leaned upon the table, reading the rules of the game that was supposed to lighten their leisure hour, the heads of Drake and Stevens were not far distant, and both were so near to Mary that the scent of her hair was in their nostrils.

"Perhaps we had better play cards," Mary suggested.

She sat upright. Stevens breathed heavily through his nostrils, and there was a glitter in his eyes as he glanced swiftly at Drake.

"Don't let's be quitters," he said, laughing queerly.

"No—I want to know this game," agreed Drake. "It seems to have something in it far beyond cards. What do you make of this, Mary?" he asked, leaning over until his face was among the girl's hair, while his finger pointed to a sentence in the rules.

"Let me see," put in Jake, and quickly reached over for the paper booklet.

He and Drake had their heads together, and their voices vibrated as they argued. Mary sat back, weary and tired. Then they referred to her again, one on each side of her.

The argument rose high. She laughed sarcastically, and suggested that this game had been brought up in order that the convalescent might enjoy a little quiet recreation. They cooled a bit, but both men had drunk in the intoxicating perfume of her. The disturbing touch of her silk-sheathed flesh had been stirring them every time they leaned across her to argue some point which, as both knew, mattered not at all.

Down on the main deck the doctor gave water to the one sheep remaining. He lingered at the pen, furtively scanning the decks. Then, swiftly dodging back to the galley, he took out something, which he rolled up in his filthy apron. Still as furtive as a thief, he stole along to the big ventilator that ran down through the midship house into the main hold.

When he returned to his galley, to take

his afternoon rest, one of the boys quit his work with Chips and climbed nimbly upon the house. Mary caught sight of his tousled head and mischievous face. She welcomed the break in her uneasy situation—for uneasy it had grown in a few minutes. Once more there was that infernal civility creeping into every word uttered between the two men beside her.

She had caught one glimpse of Stevens's face, and it made her shiver, for all the heat, so charged with strong passions was it. Drake was still more disquieting, by reason of his greater control over his outward emotions; but ever since that terrific *mêlée* in Cape Town, the long cut on his cheek, which Jake Stevens had dealt him, though it had healed, still left a narrow scar from eye to lip corner. If ever Alden Drake's blood pulsed hot in anger, that ribbonlike scar stood out vividly white. It appeared to throb, to writhe.

It was white now. It throbbed. It seemed to writhe.

Mary sat back with a sharp scraping of her stool. She could bear the tension no longer.

Upon the heavy air, shrill and excited, pealed a boyish yell from the midship housetop.

"I've got him! I've found the blighter! Here's the jolly knifer, sir!"

"Thank God!" cried Mary, leaping to her feet.

She did not mean that she was thankful that Herbert Oates was discovered. She was only mildly interested when Drake and Stevens hustled each other down the ladder, all stress cast aside at the call of grim ship's business, to investigate the boy's discovery. She didn't feel especially thrilled to see the boy draw up on a string, through the ventilator, the doctor's dirty apron, unfurled like a disreputable flag. His shrill, excited explanation that he had heard Herbert swearing when he dragged up the apron only indifferently appealed to her; but she could have hugged that pug-nosed, not overclean youth to her agitated breast and kissed him to suffocation for breaking up her self-appointed Mah Jong lesson at that fevered moment.

She did not even care to see the hold opened and Oates dragged out, jibbering like a cornered monkey. When Drake told her that the murderer was in irons, would be turned over to the police in Batavia, and would surely be hanged, she set him a puz-

zle which occupied his brain for many a day.

"It seems a pity," she murmured absently. "We owe a lot to him!"

Nor would she explain. She insisted that she could not.

XXV

THE doctor confessed his part in the concealment of Herbert Oates.

"'E killed Tony, me pal. 'E said 'e'd corpse me if I didn't look arter 'im and chuck 'im some grub down the 'old. 'E scared me, 'e did, but I knowed 'e didn't ought ter git away with murderin' one bloke and nearly croakin' Mr. Stevens; so I kep' mum, and trusted to somebody ketchin' me a lowerin' 'is grub to 'im. I wuz one too many fer 'im, the bloody knifer!"

After which admission the doctor proceeded to keep his own steel sharp on the grindstone as a precaution against the imaginary enmity of old Chips.

Oates was ironed in the sail locker. The doctor had charge of his feeding. It gave lots of opportunities for safe abuse of the man he hated.

Jake Stevens was quite recovered by the time the lookout reported the flashing light on Java Head. The winds had gone so dead that there were whole watches when the refuse dumped from the galley pail was in sight on the oily-looking water until the last fragment had been snatched up by birds or swallowed down by fish. When the light came in sight ahead, the little air that blew suddenly chopped around and came ahead.

"Won't make Prince's Channel now," grumbled Drake. "Call the hands to wear ship. Hold starboard tack until morning, unless the wind frees, Mr. Stevens."

Cursing where a song should have lightened the work, voyage weary men trooped from brace to brace, and hauled the heavy yards around until they were hard jammed against the backstays.

"Now, me sons!" wheezed stout little Joe Bunting. "Roundy, come roundy! Give it lip!"

Broken-nosed Nick Coombs, loyally backing up the one cheerful spirit, bent his powerful back and yelled:

"Stamp an' go, now! Come on!

"What 'll we do with a drunken sailor?
What 'll we do with a drunken sailor,
Early in the mornin'?"

Joe started the expected chorus:

"Way, hay, hup she rises!
Way, hay, hup she rises!
Early in the mornin'!"

But only he and Nick raised their voices. They made the men run away with the braces through bull strength alone. Joe plunged in with his shoulder, hurling men to both sides.

"Come on, Nick! Show 'em!" he wheezed ferociously.

Together the two powerful sailormen hauled around the heavy main yard, of which the full watch had made labor.

"The devil's got into the men again!" said Mary, as she noted the fruitless efforts of Joe and Nick.

She had not meant to utter her thoughts aloud, nor did she know that she had done so until the harsh laugh of Jake Stevens at her side convinced her of it.

"The devil's been aboard all the time since Table Bay," he told her.

She left him with a toss of the head. She was irritable and peevish. The head wind could not drive the ship very far out of her course, but it forced every mile covered into the wrong side of the balance, and Mary was tired of this wearisome voyage that had promised so well. She longed to step upon the quay, to lose the very sight and smell of ships, to hide herself from the moodiness of men in her brother Jack's snug little bungalow among the frangipani and bougainvilleas and scarlet poinsettias.

"Soon be ashore now, Mary," Drake told her with a smile, when she went below for a wrap, later. He was at the saloon table, with a large scale chart spread out, and a book of tides and currents. "We shall have a fair tide, anyhow, toward morning. You'll be glad to get off the ship for a while, won't you?"

"Oh, shan't I?" she echoed fervidly.

It was not intended as a query, but as a definite statement. Drake laughed quietly. She noticed that even now, even for one moment, he would not take his attention from the chart to talk to her. As he spoke, he still traced with his dividers the trend and rate of the tides, still manipulated the parallel rulers to ascertain the bearing the light must have before the ship could lay up to pass it with the wind ahead.

"We'll make up for the weariness of the voyage in Batavia," he went on. "I've got everything planned out for us. Of

course, you'll want to stay with your brother a few days—"

"I'm staying with him until he goes home."

"Well, possibly. Depends how long it is before he starts, doesn't it? Anyhow, you're going to have a high old time. Mark that down in your date book against my name, Mary! Mind you don't catch cold in the heavy dew, if you're going on deck again."

Mary flung pillows upon the coil of the main brace, and settled herself for a wakeful watch. There was comfort, at first, in the steady flash of Java Head Light. At every revolution it ruled a path from land to ship—a path of light, touching the black velvet of the night ocean with gold; but the ship moved lazily, and the light stayed long in one place. Soon Mary's eyes ached with watching it. Soon her nerves cried out against the torture.

"Dreaming, Mary?"

Jake Stevens stood over her in the darkness. His big hand lay heavily on her shoulder, and his voice was gruff; but she sensed in the weight of his hand a tenderness of touch. It was mere weight, physical weight, and not roughness. In the gruffness of his voice she detected something of wistfulness.

On that never forgotten occasion when she had tried to interest two men in Mah Jong, she had decided that never again could she hear Jake Stevens's voice, or feel his touch, without having her flesh creep. The passion that she had seen flaming in the eyes of the two men had known no difference of motive, so far as she had been aware at that time. Only later had she considered the question. When she did so, she had come to the conclusion that with the mate the desire had been for her; with Drake, for Jake Stevens's blood.

She had not been able to decide which offended her least. Six months before that moment she would have been frightened at the bare hint of passion so violent as to make it possible that a man should contemplate an attack upon her. Now, although she shivered at the thought, the bare possibility thrilled her.

It thrilled her because it aroused in her the instinct of the female to fight every male save only the desired one. The occasion had arisen once before, and she had been too confused to fight. Now she was not

quite sure that she wanted to fight with Jake. She only knew that she felt no fear—that if she decided she must fight, then fight she would and could.

She raised her face to Stevens and laughed softly.

"Dreaming? Yes, Jake—dreaming of the little bungalow over those mountains yonder. I am so tired of the voyage!"

She flung her wrap over the shoulder his hand pressed, and a wave of sensuous fragrance welled up and enveloped the man. He breathed fiercely through his nostrils. His hand contracted nervously until she cringed under the grip. Jake mumbled an apology, and let his hand pass gently to her hair. He fondled it clumsily, yet with a restraint which persuaded Mary that he was making a supreme attempt to conquer his natural uncouthness.

She grew hot. Something was imminent. She was almost too much alarmed to stay and hear; but that reawakened instinct pricked her again. She held her face toward him, unafraid, smiling, though the darkness hid her smile as it hid his passion.

"Mary, you kissed me," he said slowly. She gasped involuntarily. "You kissed me when you thought I was unconscious. I was, but your kiss dragged me out of the darkness. I saw you go out of my cabin. I knew you came in often while I was sick with that knife cut. You kissed me more than once, Mary. Why?"

His powerful fingers twined in her hair. He had put the question as if he expected a reply. She quivered exquisitely as his grip on her hair strengthened. She knew he was unaware that he hurt her; yet she could not have told him.

For the infinitesimal fraction of a second that a dream takes in passing through the brain, she saw a seashore village, people in skins, great boats storming in from the sea, and a terrible, blond warrior stalking through the surf. She knew that she was one of the cowering women there; yet she knew that she did not cower as they did. She felt the grip of the tall warrior in her long, spun-gold hair. She knew she was being dragged off, resisting half-heartedly, to his great dragon-bowed ship.

Then the picture grew misty. There was a leaping figure somewhere in the background—a darker figure, not making much display, but leaping down to attack the tall viking, who, for all his size and strength, hastened his retreat at sight of the other

figure. Strange to say, she had no definite wish as to the outcome. She felt indifferent whether ravisher or rescuer triumphed.

"Why did you kiss me, Mary?" Jake insisted.

She could have screamed with the pain of her tugged hair; yet she managed to laugh lightly.

"I was sorry for you, Jake," she said.

"Did you see your picture in my cabin?" he demanded, still in the same slow, labored tone.

"Of course! Please don't tug at my hair so fiercely, Jake! What are you driving at, acting this way?"

"Never mind how I act!" A note of savagery crept in. "You saw that picture. You gave it to me. You wrote on it. I kept it all these years, Mary. Your father gave you into my care. I have always wanted you, Mary. Then that rich dude stepped in, and—"

With a swift sidelong twist she released her hair, at the cost of a plucked strand, and scrambled to her feet. The shawl fell from her shoulders, and again the faint, sensuous perfume of her maddened the man. He seized her, preventing her from tripping over the coils of rope in which she had sat, and his hot breath was upon her face.

"Mr. Stevens, let me go!" she panted fiercely. "You are offensive! You forget Captain Drake's orders that—"

"To hell with Captain Drake's orders! To hell with Captain Drake! To everlasting hell with everything else! You shall hear me, by God, and you shall answer me, too!"

"Do you want me to cry out for help?" she whispered, pressing hard against his chest, for he was crushing her to him in blind abandon.

He had kept his own voice to a low pitch, for all the savagery of his words. He suddenly released her, and a warm flush of pity surged over her at the poignant change in his voice.

"I am sorry. Forgive me, Mary," he muttered, standing aside with bowed head. "I wanted your love. I hoped you could love me. I am a man, with a man's feelings. I have a man's right to tell my love to the woman I love."

Jake's passions were overstrong. He had fought to repress them for a moment, but he could as well have tried to level the ocean tides. Each sentence he uttered

vibrated more and more. He was again at the peak of his fury when he concluded his plea:

"You will answer me, girl! Do you love me? I want you for my wife! Am I your man?"

He gripped her again; but now she had at least regained control of her emotions. She gently pried at his gripping fingers, and replied kindly, but with finality:

"If you come to me after we get ashore, I will give you my answer, Jake. I cannot tell you now. I have never thought of you in that way."

"Meanin' you won't!" Jake cried, and laughed harshly.

"No, it doesn't mean that at all," she returned.

She was sincere in that. At the moment she was in precisely the situation of the girl with the spun-gold hair in her recent fleeting dream. For the life of her she could not have given her final troth to either the great blond warrior from the sea or the less imposing, darker figure leaping out of the obscure background to rescue her.

"Come to me when we get ashore, and I shall know what answer to give you," she said.

Jake sullenly released her with a half thrust. His breath again came hissing from his nostrils.

"All right! But take this to bed with you—I'm a man. You cast me adrift for that cold-blooded moneybag Drake, and you'll see—"

But she wanted to hear no more. She fled below and left him to his thoughts.

XXVI

ONCE Mary awakened and saw the flash of Java Head still in the porthole glass. The next time she opened her eyes the sun poured through the skylights, and she ran on deck in her wrapper, to find the ship sailing smoothly through a gorgeous golden sea, with the volcano of Krakatoa in sight to starboard. The wind was still ahead, but the ship moved fast, and the land was opening out.

By nightfall the Orontes had edged into Sunda Straits, but the wind died utterly with the sunset. Drake was anxiously plotting the currents and drift. The day's sailing had carried the ship over toward the Sumatra side of the straits, and the tide had set her in toward Sebesi Channel and the reefs off Verlaten Island.

Never steady, the fitful air only baffled the skipper in his calculations. He grew nervous as the hours of evening passed with no breeze. There was the shoreward drift always to watch. He remained on deck as long as the calm lasted, and Mary stayed up there with him. Toward midnight there came a little wind, and there was promise of a clear, breezy dawn.

"You'll go through the Sebesi Channel, won't you, Alden?" Mary asked eagerly, impatient of the ship's dawdling progress.

"No," he returned shortly. "Dangerous with such a light air."

"Oh, father went through a score of times! Besides, it saves such a waste of time!"

"I shall stand back toward Great Channel on the next tack, and pass through in daylight," he said, and encouraged her to ask no more.

Mary bit her finger nails until the quicks hurt her. Drake was undoubtedly right; but she considered that he carried caution too far.

A little later the light air failed again. Captain Drake went below to snatch a brief rest, and advised her to do so too. She would have rebelled, but Jake Stevens came on deck to take the watch, and in her irritable mood she wanted none of Stevens's company.

For two days more the ship drifted about the entrance of the straits, beset by tides, baffled by light airs that always blew ahead, completely stalled by spells of stark calm. Always the land crept higher and nearer. Sometimes there were distant specks on the glittering water, white, brown, or earth-colored, which the officers said were native boats; but the passage of Sunda Straits seemed to be as hopeless to the Orontes as the weathering of the Cape had been and still was for old *Vanderdecken* in the famous legend.

After almost fifty hours of sleepless watchfulness, Drake fell into a heavy slumber when the ship was again becalmed within a few miles of Verlaten. The three mates were on deck, hopefully getting the ship ready for port, although that port was still a hundred miles away. Another blazing day was dying.

Stevens marched the poop with swaying shoulders, brooding, seething. He had scarcely spoken to Mary since his last outburst. She watched him curiously, for he kept glancing toward the rock-strewn Se-

besi Channel, toward which the current was subtly setting. She wondered if he, too, was devoured by impatience.

The ship lay pointing to the northern end of Verlaten, as perfectly reflected in the glassy sea as if actually set in a sheet of glass or a plate of steel. Her yards were square, ready for bracing up either way if a breeze came.

Far out to the westward a faint blue line seemed to creep over the water. Jake saw it. He was a perfect sailorman. That breeze meant a fair wind at last. There would be a short board on the starboard tack to reach into the Great Channel fairway, then squared yards and a clear run through. He raised his whistle to summon the hands to the braces.

"Why don't you run through Sebesi, Jake?" suggested Mary eagerly. She gripped his arm in her excitement, and he smiled down at her admiringly as she rattled on: "If that breeze doesn't last, it'll just mean beat, beat, beat again. You know that once the ship was wind-jammed here for forty days, when father was ill, and the mate wouldn't take her through the dangerous channel. I'll bet you're not as timid as that! It'll save us miles and miles! And," she added, with a little droop to her mouth, looking up straight into his eyes, "I am so anxious to reach Batavia, Jake!"

Jake knew that he should call the skipper, but he did not. He fell—as many a better man has fallen, as many, many better men will fall in the future—for a woman's challenge.

Had he been master of the ship, he knew that he would take her through, for he had been through Sebesi many a time with old Manning. The fault was that he was not master, and did not call the master. Instead of blowing his whistle for the hands to brace sharp up on the starboard tack, he gave the helmsman a course, and the ship began to speed through the curling seas.

Mary stood at the rail, bright-eyed and rosy, her hair flying and her lips parted, thrilled with the sense of progress, but infinitely more thrilled with the knowledge of having done the forbidden, the unpardonable. Jake watched her until evening fell. He had little doubt but that his obliging her in this dereliction of duty would influence her answer when she gave it to him.

Just about the time when Ike went to call the skipper to dress for supper, the ship had swept well inside the line of reef dangers dotting the chart of the straits. No light winked friendly warning along the shore. Stevens had taken a good bearing before dark, and as long as the breeze held true and fair he had no fears; but it gradually drew ahead, fell light, and then died, and the ripple of the tide was sharp and disquieting.

Jake heard Ike call the skipper, and heard the steward answer some question which he did not hear.

Mary started sharply when the sails flapped. She tried to pierce the darkness with her keen eyes, but everything looked dark except for a strange loom that seemed to grow up out of a white fringe.

Then Drake rushed out of the companionway, staring around in alarm. He ran aft, seeking the watch officer. As he collided with Jake Stevens, boiling over with angry vituperation, the big ship shuddered from dog vanes to keel, scraped over a hidden reef, heeled over as another obstruction rose at her bilge, and staggered to a standstill.

"Where the hell have you put the ship?" shouted Drake, thrusting his face close to the mate's.

"Ask—" Jake began to reply angrily.

Mary's sharp cry seemed to cut off his words. Instead of finishing, and telling the shameful truth, he laughed savagely in the skipper's white face.

"Go to hell!" he snarled.

Mary put her hands to her ears and shrank as far into the black shadows of the deck house as she could. The very air seemed to droop low, full of evil. She could see the black shapes of three men by the wheel. The helmsman stood stolidly at the spokes, waiting for orders before he would quit the futile post. The tall shape of Jake Stevens swayed with crouching shoulders, like a bear. She could almost see the slighter but equally powerful figure of Drake between the other two; and in the subdued radiance of the binnacle light she saw the white scar on Drake's cheek quivering fearfully.

She felt a shriek forcing her throat apart, and stifled it with her hands. In the next instant she let it come forth stark and terrified; for Alden Drake leaped forward as if he had been impelled by a steel spring. His fist cracked sharply against Jake's face,

and Jake pitched through the pipe rails into the tinkling tide.

XXVII

THERE was a moment when, to Mary, the foundations of all things seemed to have collapsed. She shivered, huddled against the deck house, unable to run where she desperately desired to run—to the ship's side, over which Jake Stevens had pitched headlong. The air, so short a time ago stagnant with calm, and forbidding by reason of its very peacefulness, now seemed tormented with devils. Idle sails flapped thunderously against the masts. Somewhere in the darkness forward a heavy block thumped monotonously upon a wooden deck—thump, thump, thump, hollow and lazy, like a drum of disaster.

Mary wanted to listen for some sound from Stevens. There were so many other noises that the very noticeable sounds actually made by the infuriated mate as he grabbed futilely at the glassy smooth iron plates of the ship, seeking some hanging rope, were nothing but a note in the general uproar.

Then lanterns began to flicker about the decks. Men who had been sleeping appeared among the deck watch, startled by the ship's grounding. Very little time had elapsed since the striking, but it seemed an age to Mary.

"Let go everything, and clew up!" Drake ordered.

The men ran confusedly to halyards and clew lines, buntlines and sheets. The boson and carpenter sounded—Chips to ascertain whether the Orontes was taking in water, old Bill Gadgett with lead line, seeking to know how the ship lay.

Drake peered all around in the darkness, seeking for some hint of his position. He gave no thought to Jake Stevens over the side. In one direction he thought he saw a dark loom of land, and a faint, pale line about it appeared to be small surf. It might be merely the breaker caused by the ship's sudden halt.

Somewhere about the main brace bumpkin Stevens secured a hold, and his reappearance on board was not silent. Mary shook herself into life, ran to Drake, and put her hands on his arm.

"It wasn't Jake's fault!" she cried. "You can't put this thing on his shoulders! I told him to sail through. He only did what I—"

"Go to your cabin!" Drake told her sharply. "The deck is no place for you just now."

"But you mustn't blame—" she persisted, with a note of anger.

"I shall make an inquiry in the morning," he interrupted coldly. "Go to your cabin!"

He took her arm, urged her inside the companionway, and closed the door upon her. She flung it open and flashed out, ablaze with rage. Before she could speak a word, Drake thrust her inside again, gently, but no more to be resisted than the tides.

"Unless you obey me, I shall lock you in your room," he said.

There was something in his tone so cold, so utterly beyond argument, that Mary shrank down the stairs as if she had been whipped.

Ike was in the saloon. She permitted him to serve coffee to her, without any knowledge of how it was done or why she drank it. Alden Drake, in that moment of catastrophe to his ship, had sloughed absolutely every last attribute of human flesh and blood, and had become simply an animated piece of duty personified.

On deck, Stevens crawled over the rail, dripping and cursing. Some men hauled him in. He shook himself in the glow of the lanterns.

The decks were alive with running figures. Only the solitary, dark figure on the poop held any suggestion of calm poise. Old Bill Gadgett trotted aft from the fore-castle head, swinging his "blue pigeon." His wrinkled old face was troubled. His lower lip hung loosely.

"Three fathom whar she's nipped, sir, twenty fathom at the main chains," he reported to the captain. "Both sides, sir," he added.

"Very well, boson," Drake said coolly.

Stevens started to mount the ladder. Chips hustled along from the midship sounding pipe, his jointed sounding rod held close to his squinting eyes, chalked and wet.

"Makin' no water, sir!" said Chips. "No more in the well than we always carry, sir."

"Very well, Chips. Cast off the boat gripes ready for swinging out, and ask Mr. Twining to come aft."

Drake ignored Stevens; but Jake was not the man to be knocked into the midnight

ocean, dragged aboard by grinning seamen, and then ignored.

"Never mind Mr. Twining!" stuttered Jake, his teeth clashing with fury as he stepped before Drake and leaned toward him, all drooling water. "I'm here! You knocked me overboard, captain. I'm a man, and you can't—"

Twining ran up the ladder. Drake coolly looked past the raging Stevens.

"Mr. Twining, swing out two boats. You and Mr. Adams each take a boat and find out where we are. One of you try the shore side, and the other sound to seaward. Find out if it's possible to lay out an anchor to seaward."

"Now," said Stevens, as Twining departed, "we'll resume—"

"Leave the poop!" snapped Drake, with the first trace of real anger he had shown.

Stevens drew back, crouched, and glared through the gloom, unbelieving.

"Leave the poop!" Drake repeated. He had not honored Stevens with direct attention before. Now he advanced a step, so that he almost touched Jake's face with his cap visor. "You call yourself a sailor, and I believed you were! Now I know you're not even a half sailor. Take orders from a passenger, and a woman, do you? You're disgraced. I'll not insult the men by making you a seaman. If you show your face to me again, I'll put you in irons and lock you up with Oates. Go away!"

Jake Stevens, even though hot with rage, had the laws of the sea so deeply rooted in him that he knew he must obey that order. The bitterness of it all was intensified by the thought that Drake was right. Stevens had shown himself unworthy of trust. He had permitted a girl to swing him from his straight course of duty; but there was a long-standing grievance that rankled in his heart—a grievance which he felt was at the bottom of all the troubles that had visited the ship. No man dared stop him when he paused at the top of the poop ladder and gave expression to his feelings.

"I'll go, sir!" he rasped. "I'll go!" His deep chest heaved turbulently. The breath hissed through his quivering nostrils. "I'll not deny you're right. I'm not worthy of trust. I don't want to show you my face again. I want to hide it myself; but I'm going to tell you something for your soul's sake before I step down from the poop where I once stood in command. Captain Drake, you stand there,

owner of your own ship—a fine ship, and I won't say that a better man could stand there. You're a full sailorman. I admit I was wrong when I hammered that crimp for telling me you were; but you're something else besides that. You're a hell-blasted curse to a fine profession. Oh, don't try to stop me! I won't take a minute more. You'll have to hear me out. You, rotten with money, looking for amusement, think the bloody world's your oyster, and it don't matter to you whose knife you break opening it! The sea's my living. I've worked nigh twenty years for command. Command to me meant achievement—and a wife. To you, command is a game. You can pick from the world for a wife; and you must empty your dirty money bags to buy a sailorman out of his living. You must use your stinking gold to blind a foolish girl who don't know the world you belong to. You—"

Stevens stopped, drew in a deep breath, and seemed about to go on. Drake stood where he had been when the outburst began, motionless, pale as chalk in the lantern light, with the long scar on his face fluttering like a live thing.

Stevens started to speak, but cut short on a word, uttering a short, harsh laugh. He went down three steps of the ladder, and stopped to say quietly:

"You can end the story out of your own conscience, Captain Drake!"

He vanished in the shadows of the waist. The boats went away, clumsily, ill-manned, the long oars handled by confused seamen who were unused to small-boat work.

Drake stood like a piece of carving. Only the ribbonlike scar appeared to move. Jake Stevens had indeed told him something. Nothing he had ever heard in all his life had stirred Alden Talbot Drake as he was stirred then. Greatest jolt of all, he knew in his heart that every word hurled at him was a home truth.

He permitted nothing to interrupt the cool procedure of securing the safety of his ship and her people; but as he stood there during the dark hours, directing the boats, suggesting expedients, the words Jake Stevens had shot at him buzzed in his brain like infernal hornets.

XXVIII

AN hour before dawn Twining reported a rocky coast, apparently of volcanic formation, with sharp reefs rising from deep

water right up to the shore. Adams found that the ship lay pinned on one solitary head of rock, with deep water all around to seaward.

An anchor was laid out, with a long hawser, and led in over the ship's stern, through leading blocks, to the anchor windlass. Every man able to push on a handspike was mustered. If there was power enough, and the tide came high enough, the ship would probably slide off the way she slid on, and the damage would scarcely be worth noting in the log; but the tide had fallen considerably since the stranding, and all that the combined strength of the crew could accomplish was to get a terrific strain on the hawser, and to satisfy the captain that the anchor had taken firm hold.

"Let the men rest, Mr. Twining," said Drake, when the futility of further effort was manifest. "Keep the usual watches, and have a strain taken on the windlass from time to time. Tell the cook to have coffee ready at five, and breakfast for all hands as soon after as possible. I'm afraid we hit on the highest tide of the month to strike. It may mean waiting for the spring tides to float us clear. Keep a keen lookout. I shall lie down in the chart room. By the way, I have disgraced Mr. Stevens. He is a passenger. You will take the duties of mate, and Mr. Adams will again act as second mate, until I can inquire further into the stranding."

Jake Stevens found himself a corner on the boat skids and flung himself down to rest—to brood, rather. His heart swelled and leaped in his breast as no crisis in his life, hitherto, had been able to make it. He mentally flayed himself for his part in the business. Angry and agitated as he was, he could yet blame himself, first of all, for permitting Mary to sway him from strict adherence to the captain's orders; but the more he thought of the entire situation, the more bitter grew his resentment against Drake.

There had been a time, since leaving Table Bay, when he had almost felt admiration for the dude whom he had spurned as a possible member of his crew. He had been forced to concede, at least, that Alden Talbot Drake was a man, a sailor, and a hard, fearless fighter—a chivalrous foe, too; but everything he had done had been done in his selfish pursuit of a rich man's idle whim.

"God damn him, I'll stop him taking my woman!" swore Jake fiercely.

From where he lay he could see the dimly lighted portholes of the saloon. She was sleeping down there. Or was she lying awake, as he was, unable to sleep for the crowding memories in her brain?

"She didn't act like his woman when they found me in her cabin!" he muttered, and the memory sent the blood scalding through his swelling veins. "She gave me the lead—saved my bacon, sure!"

He frowned blackly. Several things that had happened on the voyage failed to line up exactly.

"She kissed me!" he went on, stating every instance to himself as to another person, breathing the words distinctly, yet not aloud. "Before that she spat at me like a cat. She told me she'd make me pay. She called me Jake, too; but hell, she called him Alden. By the holy Isaac, I wonder if she—" He sat up suddenly, and his scowl deepened. "Did she blarney me into taking that passage to ruin me?"

The thought was so tremendous, so bewildering, that his hot blood almost choked him. It was a terrible thought, and it had many of the earmarks of truth.

Through the black fog of that dark suspicion there loomed again the bright, kindly vision of her while she nursed him through illness; the memory of her warm, soft kiss upon his fevered brow, of her low, sympathetic voice, of her deeply glowing eyes full of pain for his pain.

"She's a sailor's girl. She couldn't do a thing like that!" he decided after long consideration.

The thought soothed him. He would see if she still meant to make him wait for the answer she had promised him. He was a broken man, now, but he was a man and a sailorman. He had battled his way so far, and could battle again. He could put up a battle such as had never been waged by man, if she would give him the answer he longed for.

With that thought uppermost in his mind he fell asleep.

The waters lapped softly around the impaled ship. The air was soft and cool. Morning was not far away. The east already had a pearly gray gleam stealing up across the velvet black of night.

Drake sat in the chart room, restless, yet knowing the need of rest. He had opened the log book to enter up the strand-

ing. His fountain pen was in poor order. As he fiddled with it, unable to write the few words needed, his mind reverted to Jake Stevens and the indictment that he had uttered.

Drake found himself wandering off into the realms of unreality, much as he used to wander at his open window, back home, when, smoking his old brier pipe, sniffing at the fog with its tang of the ships, the world of romance lay unfolded before him. From that memory he passed easily to the vision of a pair of ocean blue eyes, of brown hair holding glints of gold, of a pair of fat ponies and a bearded old man. Then Stevens arose before him again, grim, accusing, terribly truthful.

Drake at last threw down his pen without making the entry, and lay down. For a long time he strove fruitlessly to drive Mary Manning and Jake Stevens from his mind. In the end he fell into a troubled doze that gave little of rest.

And while the gray curtain stole over the east, Mary sat hunched up on her unopened bed. Her face was in the open porthole; her fingers, numbed with long holding, gripped the edge of the port box. She had not undressed.

She listened to the lapping waters. Once or twice a boat swung out from the stern of the ship and floated under her porthole, until the painter tightened and drew it astern again.

As the light brightened, she heard Ike moving in his pantry, getting toast and coffee ready for another day's beginning. She could see the dark loom of the land grow clear-cut. From her porthole the coast of a sizable island ran away into distance. It looked barren enough, but there were little stretches of beach, and here and there some wood. It was the first time she had seen a tree since leaving Table Bay. The colors were mostly gray and slate at that hour; but never had stunted and gnarled verdure seemed to her so much like the gardens of Paradise.

She surprised Ike by suddenly appearing in his pantry.

"Ike, I am so hungry!" she said, smiling at him.

The little cockney almost went on his knees to give her the first toast and the freshest coffee.

"I hate the ship now," she remarked.

The steward glanced up at her. She was flushed, and her blue eyes were dark. Ike

thought she was a bit feverish. He went on toasting at his charcoal stove. With one hand he took down from a locker a pot of marmalade, and pushed it along to her. He never gave marmalade to anybody—not even to the captain.

"Thank you, Ike," she said. "You shouldn't do this. People who do things to please me get knocked overboard, Ike. It's very, very dangerous, my friend!"

"I'd git knocked overboard, too, if you wanted me to, miss," stuttered Ike, with a rush.

She stared at the little man, wide-eyed. Then she laughed softly, and spoke in his eager ear.

At five o'clock men clustered about the galley with their hookpots, getting coffee and hardtack. On the poop Twining and Adams stood at the landward rail. Stevens watched them from his place on the skids. He had debated whether to get coffee with the men, or to go without, through pride. He had no quarrel with Twining or Adams. If he went to talk to them, Ike would no doubt bring him coffee.

"Hell's delight! He's got to feed me, if I'm a passenger!" he grinned.

The two officers were talking rather excitedly as Jake went up the ladder. At halfway he stopped, for Adams was saying:

"Ike isn't around. Miss Manning's cabin door is open, and she's not there. Her bed wasn't slept in, either. What's more, one of the boats is gone!"

Stevens dashed up the remainder of the ladder, mouthing questions. Twining had run to the taffrail, to which the boats had been tied. Abreast of the companionway door he collided with Drake coming out of the chart room.

Drake had heard, through the open ports, what Stevens had heard from the ladder. Each stopped short, confronting the other. Each flung out an accusing hand, and the tense demand:

"Where is she?"

XXIX

MEN stood with hookpots midway to their hanging lips. They remembered the exciting moments, during the early days of the voyage, when Drake, the ship's boy, dared to face Stevens, the master, in man-to-man conflict. Twining and Adams drew near, for the accusing eyes of the two angry men seemed to shoot fire at each other.

"Where is she?" demanded Drake icily.

The long scar down his cheek writhed like a white ribbon.

"You've sent her off to make sure of her, you woman buyer!" charged Stevens, with grinding teeth.

The men around the galley were drawn aft as chips are drawn by a strong current.

"Lor' lumme!" said young Tubbs hoarsely. "If they gits jammed into one another agin, me fer the mate! I'm goin' ter take a wallop at the dude meself, jus' fer luck!"

"Me, too!" agreed Sims. "The bleedin' 'ooker's ashore. What's the use o' haulin' our bloomin' guts out tryin' ter git 'er off?"

Young Adams suddenly broke the tense hush on the poop. He had swiftly glanced over the men.

"Nobody else missing but the steward, sir!" he cried.

Drake and Stevens both turned to count the crew. Each might feel sure that the other had spirited Mary away for his own devious purposes, but neither was silly enough to imagine that the other would send away a girl in the sole care of such a seafaring specimen as poor Ike Saintly. Both, however, knew Ike's value as a steward and a faithful servant, and both knew that the little cockney worshiped Mary Manning.

"I believe the silly girl has persuaded that old idiot to take her ashore!" exclaimed Drake at last.

"Not so silly, either!" retorted Stevens sarcastically. "I'd feel less like an inmate of an asylum if I was ashore, too!"

"Go!" was Drake's terse retort.

"Let me have a boat, and I'll bring her back."

"I have no boat for that purpose. Miss Manning chooses to take a boat and go ashore without my permission. She may stay until she is tired, and then come back as she went," said Drake.

Without giving the matter any further apparent notice, he called away a crew and rowed around the ship to see for himself the daylight position.

The two mates got their coffee at the galley, and pretty poor it was. It started them off on their day's work in less than their customary good temper. When Drake returned from his inspection, a grumbling crew and irritable officers awaited his word.

"Take one watch to the windlass, and keep a strain on the hawser," he said. "The tide is rising, and the ship only hangs by an isolated boulder on the round of her bilge. If the sea rose a little, she would slip off. Take the other watch, and heave up all the chain from the locker. Bring it aft, along with the spare anchors. I think she'll slip off under strain at high water."

"Blimy!" grumbled Sims. "Are we men? Are we goin' to haul our insides out fer nothin'?"

"Not you ain't, me son!" quoth old Bill Gadgett grimly. "You git down in the chain locker, an' clear the kinks out. Slip-py, now!"

"It's voolitchness, dot's vot id iss!" muttered a fat-necked seaman with a small head.

"Down you go, Dutchy!" the boson said decisively. "Growl yer may, but work yer must! Nobody sojers 'ere 'cept Mr. Stevens, an' he don't count—not at present he don't. Shake a leg, me sons!"

Twining and Adams drove their gangs to work, and the clinking monotony of the capstan pawls began to stab the still air. Stevens paced back and forth in the waist, his blond face red with shame, the glitter of cold fury in his blue eyes.

Drake paced the poop, coldly aloof. If he had a thought outside of his ship and her predicament, it failed to register on his face. He watched the sweating sailors drag up great lengths of rusted cable and fleet them along the main deck on plank skids. Chips was too good a sailorman to permit the decks to be scarred up, even though the ship was aground, and he made the men haul every link along planks.

Heavy spare anchors were swung down from the forecabin head. They all came aft, and Drake keenly calculated the spot for the weight to be placed, in order that so small a difference might have the greatest effect. At the top of the tide, in an hour or so, a very little alteration in weight might decide whether the Orontes would return to her natural element again, or would remain fettered to the shore until spring tides.

The clacking pawls ceased. The men streamed sweat. Even fat little Joe Bunting wheezed horrible profanity, as soon as his vocal powers were relieved of the necessity of bawling encouraging chanteys. Strain as they might, they only made the nine-inch coir hawser twang and stretch.

"Even the bloomin' hanchor don't drag 'ome to give us a rest!" he wheezed.

Some of the men were less considerate of the ship. They agreed with Tubbs and Sims. All this back breaking, heart racking labor was futile. Some—those who most loyally backed the mates and Joe Bunting—glanced darkly at the pacing figure of Jake Stevens in the waist. The doctor, almost crying as he handled a chain hook and dragged rusty cable along the planks, cursed venomously at sight of the pallid face of Herbert Oates pressed against the iron bars of his prison door.

"The bloke as shoved her ashore walks the deck like me lord chancellor!" swore a young seaman viciously.

"Yus, an' 'im what murders shipmates larfs at pore fellows as is workin' to save 'is bloomin' neck!" yelled the doctor, coming forward to get a fresh haul of chain.

"Oh, shut up!" cried one of the apprentices disgustedly. "You chaps ought to wear dresses. Saving his neck—yes, for the gallows! I'll ask the old man to let you change places with 'Erb, if you'd like to do it!"

By ten o'clock the tide was full. All the movable weight forward, except the deck water tanks, had been shifted aft.

"Try her now, Mr. Twining!" cried Drake eagerly.

Sullenly the men shipped their capstan bars again. Every man in the ship except Drake, Stevens, and Oates put his weight to the bars.

"Heave!" wheezed Joe Bunting. "Oh, heave an' bust 'er!"

It was useless to start a song. The ship must be moved before she would begin to slide fast enough to call for a song; but to move her was a terrific task. With muscles cracking, with veins swelling on the foreheads of the few real workers, only the "Clack, clack, cla-a-ack!" of three reluctant pawls resulted.

Mr. Twining straightened his agonized back. Mr. Adams almost fell forward at the expiration of his heroic effort.

"Blimy, I'm done!" panted Joe Bunting, exhausted.

Nick Coombs, silent hitherto, but heaving with every atom of his tremendous arm and shoulder power, glared with glassy eyes from beneath lowering, dripping brows, shaking his head, beaten.

"Ought to make everybody give 'is pound!" he grumbled.

Young Adams, knowing that the man spoke only the truth, glanced along the deck at Stevens and at the sail locker door. He knew how useless all this labor was. He thought he knew, anyhow; and the coffee had been pretty bad. Adams was ready to back his skipper to the limit, as was Twining; but he was young, and, with the hastiness of youth, he was likely to overlook a few things in the heat of annoyance. He watched Drake, pacing the poop, apparently only thinking up ways to further bedevil the mates and the men.

What Alden Drake was really thinking about was how he could get his ship afloat and on her way to her port with the least delay. He knew quite well that when the high tides of the new moon came there would be water enough to float the Orontes free; but though calms are frequent in Sunda Straits, there are breezes too—hard breezes, sometimes more than hard breezes. Let the sea rise just the least bit beyond a gentle swell, and it would almost undoubtedly mean a lost ship.

In those hours, just balancing on either side of high water, it is certain that Drake had in mind nothing in the world except the security of his ship. To do him entire justice, it was not because she represented to him cash invested. So far as the loss was concerned, he would have let it go without any more qualms than a gale-stolen sou'wester would afford him; but she was his command, his sacred trust. He had taken command of the Orontes to carry her to Batavia. He owed responsibility to his ship, as he did to his cargo shippers and to his passengers.

He would attend to his passenger later. At present there was yet something left untried.

"Mr. Twining!" he called out.

Twining responded briskly. Here, surely, was word to quit breaking the men's hearts.

Drake leisurely packed his old black brier pipe, and as leisurely lit the tobacco. The smoke was jetting freely when Twining appeared at the head of the ladder.

"Mr. Twining, you may 'vast heaving for this tide." Twining's face brightened. "Let the men get their dinners, give 'em a spell for a smoke, then go to work and shift the water tanks aft."

Twining's jaw dropped. His eyes clouded. Drake puffed placidly at his pipe, and went on in the same voice that he might

use to tell Ike to put buttons in a clean jacket:

"To-morrow, if shifting the tanks doesn't help her off, we'll open the forehold and break out those Manchester cases. Send the cook aft to set the cabin table when the men have got their rations."

Twining was halfway down the poop ladder before he could govern his voice enough to respond:

"Aye, aye, sir!"

He said nothing to the men except that they were to have their dinners and a smoke. He saw them troop forward in glee. Only the doctor growled at his extra cabin work, and nobody cared what the doctor said.

Twining felt, however, that he must pass the bad word along to Adams, and he told him as they walked slowly aft. Jake Stevens, from his refuge on the boat skids, where he had betaken himself to smoke a pipe and ponder, heard what was said.

"Some of the men are ready to chuck in their hands now," declared Adams. "Break out cargo in this heat? Have to do it, I suppose. The old man knows his business. It's damned hard, though. I don't believe the ship can move before spring tides."

"I'll agree it's hard," returned Twining; "but if Captain Drake says he can move the ship, be damned if I'll believe it impossible as long as he carries on trying. I'm waiting to see him set sail and back her off yet!"

Stevens watched the last sailor carry the last mess tub into the forecabin. Then the doctor shambled aft, cursing, taking off his filthy apron and turning it before entering the saloon door.

The great hawser stretched taut as a harpstring along the deck, a man's height up, from the forecabin head leads to the fair-leader on the poop. It quivered to the strong ripples of the ebbing tide. So terrific was the strain upon it that where it entered the sea it was scarcely more than one-half its normal diameter. Possessed of tremendous elasticity, too, was that coconut fiber towing hawser. It exerted a pull of many tons, even while stretched there motionless.

Drake knew what he was about when he planned every move he had made—Stevens conceded that; but Jake was thinking of many things not concerned with coir cables and strains. First he must feed himself,

since neither mates nor men tendered him an invitation to eat.

He lowered himself to the deck, and looked inside the galley. The dishes for the saloon dinner were in the open oven. The doctor was preparing the table. There were six lumps of boiled salt beef, steaming greasily in a large dish pan. They were extra rations, cooked ready for certain cold meals to come. There was a bread locker full of ill-colored, fresh bread.

Jake dumped out the beef, and selected the best of it—the least horsy piece. This, with two cobs of bread wrapped up in his jacket, he replaced in the dish pan. He felt in his pockets, made sure he had his pocket knife, and then, with a swift glance along the decks, he darted to the ship's side nearest the shore. The island lay a cable length distant, and the receding tide was leaving its fanged shores all slimed and glistening with wet weed.

High voices could be heard from the forecastle, where tired and surly men argued loudly and rebelliously. Stevens grinned, but without any pleasure or amusement. It was the grim grin of an upright man about to do something that was not upright. It was the grin of the outcast.

Jake Stevens felt his position intensely. He knew that he was neither master nor man, neither welcome passenger nor useful crew. He had no doubt whatever that reaching port, to him, meant nothing at all but the loss of his certificate, and starting all over again.

With every sinew of his powerful frame at tension, he stealthily lowered himself into the water by a rope end, clutching the dish pan in one encircling arm until he could set it afloat. Then he pushed off from the ship and swam swiftly toward the shore, carefully floating the pan ahead of him.

He turned when he had almost reached the rocks. The doctor had not appeared yet. Stevens grinned again, and now there was a trace of satisfaction in the grin. He had formed a splendid plan. If he could only win out of sight from the ship before the doctor discovered the loss of the beef and bread, he would soon be sitting on top of the world!

He scrambled out of the water, carried his stores hurriedly out of sight beyond the waterside, and crouched expectantly among the rocks.

The doctor's untidy head bobbed along above the rail of the Orontes, going to the galley. Jake listened and watched. The doctor reappeared, and passed back to the cabin. Apparently he had been so intent upon the cabin dishes that he had not noticed the loss of beef and bread.

Jake started off again as soon as the bobbing head disappeared. He marched over the rough ground, chuckling. Beyond the rocky shore the ground rose more gently. He ducked around a blunt face of volcanic débris, and came in sight of a long stretch of comparatively shelving beach. A few trees grew in the sand, and there was plenty of coarse camel grass; but far more welcome than trees or grass was the sight of the ship's missing boat drawn up to a flat rock about a mile distant, and obviously tied there.

Stevens walked rapidly inland, until certain of invisibility from the ship. Then he strode buoyantly along toward the boat. Where that boat was, Mary was near. He knew the island, and knew that she could never get far away, so long as she remained upon it.

He had been afraid that she had urged Ike Saintly to dare the straits with her. That would have been no great undertaking for a sailor, or for a sailor's daughter, either, in the weather prevailing. A fine little air of wind blew on the straits side of the island. It was no more than twenty-four or twenty-five miles to Anjer, and from Anjer they could go by railroad to Batavia.

But Jake wanted to have something to say about her making that trip in a ship's boat. For that he had stolen beef and bread; for that he had swum ashore like a thief. There was fresh water in the boat's bareca, he knew. Who should know, if he didn't? Hadn't he been a good chief mate? Very well! A good chief mate will always know that there is fresh water in the ship's boats.

They could sail over to Anjer before night. She would be glad enough to go with him. Wasn't she neglected and forlorn, as he was outcast and shamed? Wasn't it all on her account?

Moreover, there was the matter of an answer. What better occasion than this to ask that answer?

Jake was almost happy when he topped a grassy knoll and abruptly came in sight of the boat again. Between it and him was

a stunted tree, covered with hanging, dead moss. The shore was covered with drift-wood. Some pieces of timber had been propped against the tree. Ike Saintly was carrying other pieces from the shore, and before the propped timbers, which formed a rough shelter, Mary knelt in the pebbly sand, cooking a thick slice of ham, toasting it on a stick over a smoky fire of brine-impregnated wood that volleyed sparks as well as smoke.

She started up as Jake set a stone rolling under foot. Her eyes opened wide in alarm. Ike dropped all his load except one stout bit of oak or teak, and came running at her involuntary cry.

"Don't sing out, Mary!" Jake cried. "No need to be frightened of me, lass!"

"Go away!" she panted. "Go back! I'm not going with you! Ike!"

"Hush, my girl, hush!" he soothed. "I've come for my answer."

(To be concluded in the October number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

THE SLAVE AT HER FEET

My head is at your feet!

Two Cytherean doves—

The same, oh, cruel sweet,

As were the Queen of Love's—

They brush my dreaming brows

With silver, fluttering beat,

Here in your golden house,

Beneath your feet.

No man that draweth breath

Is in such happy case;

My heart to itself saith:

"Though kings gaze on her face,

I would not change my place;

To lie here is more sweet,

Here at her feet."

As one in a green land

Beneath a rosebush lies,

Two petals in his hand,

With shut and dreaming eyes,

And hears the rustling stir

As the young morning goes

Shakily abroad the sweet

Of each awakened rose,

So to me lying there

Comes the soft breath of her—

There at her feet!

Oh, little careless feet that scornful tread

Upon my dreaming head,

As little as the rose

Of him who lies there knows

Know you of me,

Nor of what dreams may be

Beneath your feet;

Ah, dreams of your fair head,

Your golden hair outspread

And all your moonlit myrrh

That shines to-day so fair

And smells to-day so sweet,

Under my feet!

Richard Le Gallienne

Shirley Carries the Torch

HOW A GREENWICH VILLAGER DISCOVERED THAT THE VILLAGE IS NO LONGER THE CENTER OF EMANCIPATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

By Reita Lambert

SHIRLEY DEANE was one of those charmingly radical young persons who occasionally figure in the news columns, and who contribute such a refreshing note to the rival of the news columns—the afternoon tea.

Although she was the product of a sedate and pious paternity, Shirley had blossomed forth into an autonomist of the first order. As a natural sequence, she had migrated from her home town to the metropolis and had established herself in the Village, where the word "autonomy" was less likely to be confused with "anatomy," and therefore frowned upon as vaguely indelicate.

In the Village, Shirley's habitat consisted of a pair of undersized rooms over the Fighting Cock Tea Shop, which she shared with a sister radical who, as a despised but necessary step to literary fame, did confessions in the first person for a lurid magazine. Shirley herself held a less colorful but more remunerative position as secretary to a Wall Street broker, and she paid for her inferiority by doing most of the housework of the "studio." The word had been sired by the renting agent, and Shirley promptly adopted it in preference to "apartment," which smacked of circum-spect routine and properly indorsed wedding certificates.

In the Village, Shirley's autonomic theories fattened on the latitudinous philosophy of her new cronies—a philosophy that scorned creeds and codes and precedents. Then she met Harwood Skilton. Harwood was long and lank and melancholy, and an erstwhile artist. According to his confreres, he had once possessed the spark of true creative genius; but that had been before

his marriage. Harwood had made the fatal mistake of marrying money.

Than "money" there is no more unpopular word in the Village vocabulary—unless, perhaps, it is "marriage." The habitués of the Fighting Cock invariably spoke of money with twitching lips and quivering nostrils. Money was death to the creative urge; money blunted the perceptions; money and marriage had done for Harwood Skilton.

That he was aware of their contempt was evidenced by the hang-dog air with which he wore his expensively tailored suits—the Fighting Cock was decently shabby. Yet the artist's misfortunes had lent him an aura that his artistic efforts had never achieved. He knew that he was an object of pity to his former associates—that his artistic eclipse was gratifying proof of their theory.

Shirley, who took her meals at the Fighting Cock, had heard Harwood's tragic story. When she met him, her eyes were aglow with sympathy. The artist's melancholy gaze was shot through with admiration, as he took possession of the vacant chair at her table.

Since the patrons of the Cock never, under any consideration, discussed generalities, they were presently engaged in a lively exchange of autobiographical repartee.

"I used to live just around the corner," the artist confided, "and take my meals here—when I ate. Now I sneak back occasionally and try to invoke some of those old dreams."

"And do you succeed?" asked Shirley, genuinely interested.

"Fleetingly," he said sadly. "Fleetingly. And you?"

"Oh, I'm a newcomer," Shirley confessed. "I was being stifled in an up-State town—you know, the Ladies' Aid, and a shower for the newest engaged girl, and homemade cake sales. I never knew freedom until I came down here. Freedom is the most wonderful thing in the world, don't you think?"

"And you are the most beautiful!" supplemented the artist dreamily. "I should like to do a pastel of you."

"Then why don't you?" was Shirley's matter-of-fact reply.

He sighed voluminously.

"Once I might have; but now"—he shrugged—"I have lost all that."

Shirley was moved.

"You must come to see me some time, and we will talk about it," she told him.

The invitation marked the apex of Shirley's mutiny against the conventions. Hitherto she had been only a vicarious sharer of the Village's doctrine of liberty; now she openly affiliated herself with the progressives. Harwood came and they talked—about Harwood, and, subtly, about the tragedy of marital mistakes.

Harwood was wistful and enigmatic. Somehow Shirley got the impression that the erstwhile artist had scarcely been a conscious party to his marital *faux pas*—that he had waked up one morning to find himself bound for life to a Park Avenue apartment and a dollar mark without a soul. He no longer, he confided, had any incentive to work. He could not work in a conventional atmosphere. Convention clipped the wings of inspiration.

"But conventions are absurdly archaic, these days," Shirley contended stoutly. "Who cares for conventions any more?"

"Alas!" the artist sighed, and smiled down upon her indulgently. "You know only the Village, and the Village is bounded on the north by Fourteenth Street, my dear Miss Deane, and on the south by immigrants. Save for you free spirits congregated down here, New York is like the rest of the world—bound!"

They were very subtle and very obscure. Harwood Skilton frankly paid court to Shirley, and Shirley thought the artist a very handsome and agreeable martyr to all the laws against which she was rebelling. Later she summarized the situation to Irene Albright, with whom she lived:

"He's tied for life to some darned female full of inhibitions and primitive ideas

about the sacred institution of matrimony. Of course, he's under obligation to her—she lifted him out of his poverty; but it has smothered his genius. She's stifling him. He has no interest in art any more, and there he is, chained to her by his sense of duty. It's preposterous!"

Irene looked up from her typewriter, where she had been tacking the moral to her latest confession. Irene's past was as blameless as if it had just been scrubbed with chloride of lime, but she was gifted with an adroit imagination.

"When you've been here a little longer, you won't get so exercised over that sort of thing," she observed sagely. "I might get a confession out of it—'How I Smothered My Husband's Genius.'"

"It isn't a joke," Shirley returned indignantly. "It's terrible to kill a man's soul, and that's what she has done. He ought to divorce her!"

"For murder?"

"It's odd she hasn't divorced him. She must see by this time that they have nothing in common."

"Maybe she likes him," suggested Irene. "She married him, you know."

Shirley turned away impatiently. Since her advent in the Village she had been an avid listener to the doctrine of freedom, as expounded by its glib advocates in the Fighting Cock. Harwood presented to her the first concrete example of the fate dealt out to those who become enmeshed in the chains of man-made laws—the first, rather, that had come to her notice since she had discovered that these laws were no longer tolerated by the enlightened.

By the term "enlightened," Shirley referred, of course, to the Village. Here, though the rest of the world was still in darkness, the first feeble torch of true liberty had been kindled.

"But it will be a brave spirit who dares carry that torch into the ranks of the hide-bound and the blind," sighed Harwood, during one of their talks in Shirley's sky-blue studio.

"It must be done some time," Shirley averred stoutly.

"Ah, you are very brave, very trusting, and very lovely!" the artist announced wistfully.

"We must be brave, if we are to free the world from its bondage," Shirley said severely.

She felt immensely important and im-

mensely relieved to bring the discussion back to this supposititious plane.

II

It was plain, even to the high-minded Shirley, that their discussions had of late been slipping from the intellectual to the personal—that the artist had, in fact, come very close to making love to her. This she must avoid—not because Shirley, in her newer understanding of life, was shocked at the idea of a married man's making love to her, but because she was interested in Harwood Skilton subjectively. He embodied the unjust conditions she so scorned.

Of course, if he were to rebel openly against his domestic tyranny—if he were to return to art and poverty—she might permit a personal note to creep into their intellectual tête-à-têtes. At present he was only a "case"—her particular case, about which she felt she must do something.

She said as much to Irene Albright when the artist had reluctantly gone off to his Park Avenue apartment one evening. Irene had just returned from a *soirée* held in the back room of the Spiced Pepper Shoppe. She had had a marvelous time, she told Shirley, until the poetical celebrity and guest of honor had gone to sleep on one of the tables.

"What's this about your darned artist?" she added.

"I feel—I feel he can't go on like this," Shirley announced. "I feel as if I ought to do something about it."

"Do!" echoed Irene incredulously. "My dear, if you weren't such a baby, you wouldn't take this so hard. You'd know that down here we don't do—we talk!"

"Well, I think that's just plain cowardice!" Shirley said stoutly. "What's the use of advocating social reforms, and trying to enlighten the world, if you don't do anything?"

"Lots of use. It gives us a chance to talk. That's exactly what the Village is for. It's a wonderful place to air your inner convictions."

"Well, what's the use of having convictions if you don't have the courage of them?" demanded Shirley belligerently.

Irene's expression was scornful.

"You are a boob! Think you're going to go out and amend the Constitution, or expurgate the marriage service?"

"No," rejoined Shirley sturdily; "but I *am* going to do something about Harwood Skilton. I feel that he's my particular responsibility. He has confided in me, and I know that he depends on me to help him. He'd help himself if he weren't so hampered by Victorian chivalry; yet all the time his talent is just going to waste because he's chained to that woman."

"How can you be sure he is chained?"

"He's hinted it a thousand times. Besides, you know matrimony—the dull and disheartening effect a domestic routine has on a sensitive man."

"Well," Irene yawned, "I don't see what you can do about it. If he won't free himself—"

"Then I will!" announced Shirley. "I'll do it for him!"

"You?" Irene woke up and stared. "You? But how?"

"Why, it's very simple. I don't see why it never occurred to me before. I shall go to see his wife."

"His wife!" shrilled Irene. "You'd never dare. What would you say?"

"Why," Shirley explained, "I shall just put the thing up to her. I'll put my theory to the test. I shall point out to her that she is killing something that doesn't belong to her—her husband's genius. I shall point out to her that nothing is holding him to her, now, but an empty ceremony. I shall tell her that she must divorce him—that's all!"

"All!" whispered Irene. "You'd never dare, Shirley Deane!"

"And why not?" Shirley demanded. "It's perfectly practical, and a lot more moral than criticizing her behind her back. If I believe in all these things, why shouldn't I practice them? It's about time these old fogies were wakened up a bit, anyway." She wagged her head thoughtfully. "I'll run up on Saturday. Mr. Bower will give me the morning off, I know."

"She'll think you're mad," warned Irene. "She'll have you locked up."

"Oh, no, she won't!" Shirley said confidently. "I'll show her that it's just a matter of evolution."

Thinking it over later, she felt like a pioneer. She was about to carry the torch into the ranks of the hidebound and the blind, as Harwood had called them. The thought of liberating him fired her. Sure-

ly her motive was a noble one! If, according to the Village, the world was on the threshold of a newer and braver era, it was about time some one took a definite step across that threshold; and why not she?

III

SATURDAY morning found Shirley making her way toward the lamentably respectable region of Park Avenue and Harwood Skilton's ignominious prison.

As she neared her destination, she realized, with a twinge of fear, that her mission was indeed an audacious one. She was about to ask another woman to divorce her husband. Audacious—yes, but only practical common sense. The woman must be made to see this—to see, as well, that Shirley's motive was purely altruistic. She told herself that she must be calm, as she entered the foyer of an ostentatiously expensive apartment building.

She was stopped, on her way to the elevator, by a uniformed and impressive gentleman who looked as if he might be closely related to royalty. She was compelled to confide her name and the nature of her business with Mrs. Skilton.

"Miss Deane," said Shirley. "Please tell her that it is a personal matter, and very urgent."

The impressive gentleman communicated this intelligence to the switchboard operator, who transmitted it to an unseen ear, while Shirley smiled her anarchistic contempt for such empty pageantry. Then she was admitted into the gilt-embellished elevator. The trig little maid who met her at the door of the Skilton apartment regarded her doubtfully.

"I took your message. Mrs. Skilton isn't up yet. She asked me to see you."

"But I must see Mrs. Skilton personally," Shirley announced firmly. "Tell her, please, that it concerns a—a mutual friend, and that it is most important."

While she waited in a rococo boudoir, she had a twinge of pity for the ineffectual Harwood, who had been smothered by all this expensive elegance, and a feeling of contempt for a woman who was still abed at eleven o'clock in the morning. Then the maid reappeared and announced that Mrs. Skilton would see her.

She led Shirley into a bedroom that looked for all the world like a stage set in a risqué French farce. It was a room such

as the Village strived for; but where the Village had only its little pots and tubes of lurid paint, and its scant scraps of cheesecloth and denim, here were lustrous satins and priceless tapestries and bizarre knickknacks from fabulous countries. It wasn't at all the sort of room in which Shirley had expected to find the artist's wife.

A muffled voice reached her as she stood gaping on the threshold:

"Come in! Morning! Hope you don't mind this—but Jean said you were in a rush. I've been trying to place you, but I always have a devil of a time remembering names!"

Shirley's eyes were fastened in horror on the face against the pillows in the canopied bed, which, she concluded, must be the face of Harwood's moneyed spouse. Of the face there was little to be seen save a patch or two of pinkish skin and a pair of bright blue eyes peering through a crisscross of adhesive tape and bandages.

"Oh!" she faltered. "I didn't know—I wouldn't have bothered you, if I had known that you had been hurt—"

"Doesn't hurt—at least, nothing does except this damned nose-shaper! Here, Jean—get this stuff off me, so I can talk! For God's sake, get a move on!"

The maid moved swiftly to the bed and began deftly prying loose and lifting off the swaddling bandages.

Mrs. Skilton's small but well shaped nose rode into view. A couple of invisible clasps behind her ears were loosened, and her chin was free. Bands of narrow tape were dislodged, and her forehead was clear. Instead of the wounds and gashes which the throbbing Shirley had expected, there were only a pretty, petulant face in a frame of bobbed and hennaed locks. She smiled up at her astounded visitor.

"Feel more human when I get out of my harness! That muscle builder stops my gab, but it's good!" She prodded her cheeks here and there with a vivid pink forefinger. "Gimme a cigarette, Jean! Have one, Miss—er—"

"Deane," Shirley supplied feebly, and shook her head.

Mrs. Skilton drew herself up in an impalpable cloud of pink georgette and lace, and drew a satin robe across her shoulders.

"And coffee, Jean—*tout de suite!* Now, Miss Deane! Sit down, won't you?"

Shirley sank gratefully into a chair. Mrs. Skilton inhaled deeply and blew a smoke ring toward the silk canopy above her.

"I never could get my nerves cranked up in the morning if it weren't for this!" She waved her cigarette at Shirley. "Sure you won't have one? No? Well, then—Jean said you wanted to see me about some one."

Jean swallowed hard. She was like a hunter who discovers that his ammunition has been rained on.

"I did—I do, I mean—about—er—about your husband. I'm acquainted with Mr. Skilton, and—"

"A friend of Woody's? Why didn't you say so?" cried Mrs. Skilton cordially. "Howdy and welcome! Where the devil's my coffee? Well, and what's good old Woody been up to lately?"

"Why, nothing that I—I know of."

"Running true to form, is he? That's Woody for you! Doing nothing is his long suit!" She giggled. "Must admit he does it darned well. How is the old boy?"

Shirley regarded her blankly.

"You see, I happen to be married to Woody right now, so I don't get a glimpse of him very often. Ah, Jean! Put it there—I hope it's got a kick!"

Shirley searched frantically for words as her hostess reached for the cup her maid had filled. Unaccountably, her brave speeches had left her. They had seeped away as she sat there staring—a recession of inapplicable words. But those bright blue eyes were questioning her over the coffee cup, and she stumbled into speech.

"I—it was about Harwood's art."

"Art!" echoed Harwood's wife reflectively. "Oh, that's so! Woody did use to play around with that art stuff, didn't he? Has he been doing it again?"

"N-no," stammered Shirley. "That's it—I—we think he ought to."

"Well, I don't know about that 'ought' stuff," considered Mrs. Skilton; "but of course, if the world is hankering after another 'September Morn,' or something, he might—just to oblige!" She grinned across at her caller. "He's an obliging cuss, Woody. Why don't you ask him?"

"We thought—that is, it seemed to us—I'm from the Village, you see, and he's still thought very talented down there. It seemed to us that since he—he married—that you—"

"Oh! You want *me* to ask him!" Harwood's wife broke in brightly. "But I'm afraid I couldn't do that. You see"—she took Shirley into her confidence—"I'm only Woody's wife, and of course I'd hate to butt in on a personal matter like that. He'd think I had a fierce nerve, because he knows darned well I don't know a Manet from a Monet. Besides, being married to him hampers me, you know."

"B-but that's just it!" stammered Shirley. "Since he married—"

"Oh, I know you think it gives me certain rights and privileges," broke in Mrs. Skilton; "but you're all wrong. Marriage doesn't give you anything but a joint checking account these days—and you're lucky if you get that. Not that I don't think it's an improvement on the old 'love, honor, and obey' stuff. It's bad enough to be married, I say, but how the devil are you going to avoid it when it's the only doggy thing left to do?"

"You mean—it's considered—er—doggy—to marry?"

"Why, my dear infant, it's the only thing to do these days! You've got to get a 'Mrs.' tacked on your name before you'll be received any more. It's the key to freedom!" She shrugged resignedly. "You can't get a dancing partner or a decent bootlegger, these days, unless you are married—now that the vamp and the *ingénue* are *passé*. There used to be a time when a shady reputation would get you into any drawing-room in town. Now you can't even get talked about unless you're married. The scarlet lady's lost her kick, and the vamp doesn't go. That's what I told Woody, when I got bored trying to do something unique enough to get a little spotlight. 'Let's get some lilies of the valley and one of those platinum things they sell for wedding rings these days,' I said. So he did. There wasn't anything else to do."

Shirley's face was pale and her throat full.

"Nothing else to do?" she whispered.

"Nothing that had a kick to it," Harwood's wife explained. "Matrimony's the preferred stock these days. Everything else has gone out—free love and illicit affairs." She sighed and lit another cigarette. "Why, I know a single woman with a past like a Harvard tie, and she hasn't got a chance against a respectable married woman! Of course, it's only a fad, I sup-

pose. People are so fed up with this radical stuff, don't you think?"

"Radical stuff?" echoed Shirley.

"You know what I mean. Everything else has been so overworked that there wasn't anything unconventional left to do but to get married. Of course, there's always divorce; but that's as conventional as the devil, and if there's one thing I can't stand it's conventionalities!"

Shirley said like a dazed parrot:

"Conventions smother inspiration."

"Sure they do!" agreed Mrs. Skilton. "Just what I've always said. People ought to be free!"

"That's it!" Shirley broke in desperately. "If that is your conviction—"

"Conviction!" cried Harwood's wife incredulously. "My dear, I never owned one! How can you be free if you're all cluttered up with convictions? A bird's free, but who ever heard of a bird having a conviction? Minute you give birth to a bunch of convictions, you're a slave to 'em—like having a bunch of kids."

Shirley was aware that her brain was functioning like a merry-go-round. She rose unsteadily.

"I—I'm afraid I must go now," she announced weakly. "It's been very interesting, this talk—"

"I'm afraid I've bored you to sleep," Mrs. Skilton apologized; "but I'm always talkative after breakfast. It's the coffee, I guess. It was sweet of you to take such an interest in Woody. I'll—"

"M. d'Angers calling, *madame!*" The trim little maid had appeared in the doorway. She held a square white box, from which she lifted a corsage of orchids. "He brought these, and asks if you will see him."

"Orchids!" gurgled Harwood's wife. "Sure I'll see him! Hand me the mirror, Jean, and my make-up box." She turned to Shirley. "Don't run off, my dear. It's only a defunct count. He's not bad—the only Frenchman I ever knew who kept his

watch in his pocket—or maybe it's in hock. I never thought of that!"

She was dabbing briskly at her cheeks and lips from the array of jars the maid held for her. Shirley moved dazedly toward the door.

"Must you run? Well, don't worry about Woody!" She lowered her voice. "Between ourselves, Woody was probably the feeblest artist the Village ever produced—and there's no gland treatment for *that*, you know!"

Shirley mumbled an appropriate word of thanks for this reassurance, and took another step toward the door, but Harwood's wife was regarding her reflectively over the top of her hand mirror.

"Speaking of the Village, my dear, why don't you break away from it and move uptown, where there's a little life?" She shook her bobbed locks warningly. "I lived there for a while, and, suffering Sally, I was so bored it's a wonder I didn't take to dope! Of all the dull places in the world, that Greenwich Village is the dullest. Not that I haven't a proper respect for these good old-fashioned ideals and all that; but when it comes to spending your evenings drinking poisonous hooch out of coffee cups, and talking about how great you are and how worthless everybody else is, I draw the line. Give me a peppy roof garden and a bootlegger that knows how to get bonded stuff!"

Mrs. Harwood's voice followed Shirley as she fled down the hall. It was still in her ears when she reached the street and started swiftly back toward the Village and the chaste security of the Fighting Cock. As she hurried fearfully along, Harwood's succinct phrase rode into her mind:

"To carry the torch into the ranks of the hidebound and the blind!"

Well, she had carried the torch, but something was wrong. It had been for all the world like liberating a firefly in a room dazzlingly illuminated by electricity.

WITH YOU

OTHERS may lead me to the feast,
And others by my will be led;
Each day may see my store increased
By others' gifts; but when all's said
I'd rather trudge a common way
With you, than reign in Arcady!

William A. Drake

Motherhood

A STORY OF HUMAN AND ANIMAL LIFE IN THE SNOWY NORTH

By Alan Sullivan

AIVICK, the Caribou, rolled over in his sleeping bag, then sat up and stretched his short, thick arms. A light that was hardly light filtered through the curved dome of the igloo roof, and revealed the shapeless heap where Allegoo, the Drinking Cup, slumbered with her newborn son. For the rest of it, there was the fishing hole in the floor, a stone lamp, a bundle of skins, and Aivick's hunting gear. Such, together with the kayak and its double-bladed paddle, hidden fifty miles away on shore, were the possessions of the hunter.

He sat for a moment, thinking hard. Being caged in the snow walls of his dwelling, there reached him no drone of wind, no breath from the arctic, but from the tunneled door came a whimper, and the quick sniffing of black and pointed noses. The team was awake, too, it seemed. Aivick smiled gravely, as smiles a man whose mind is heavy. Then he fingered the sinew line that ran into the green depths below; but the line was loose.

He wondered what had become of all the salmon, for with the square flipper seal they seemed to have deserted this corner of the arctic; but since in the Far North there is no room for wonder, but only for action, he wasted no time in vain regrets. The imperative need was for food. Without food, those small and dusky lips would seek the comforting breast in vain. So Aivick slipped noiselessly to the floor, and, after a steady look at the pride of his heart, gathered spear, rope, and knife, and crawled into the outer world.

The sky was gray, and he caught a threatening note in the wind, which came, with driving snow, straight out of the west. It was time for the ice to begin its magnificent march toward Baffin Bay and the North Atlantic, where gradually it would

disappear beneath the incessant assaults of the waves; but Aivick reckoned that his particular section of the tribe's floating home was too large to get into motion at once.

Three miles away he knew of a lane where the green water was clear, and there, if anywhere, he should find a square flipper. So he jammed the dogs' heads into their collars, jumped on the sledge, and, with a guttural command, tore off into the unknown. In thirty seconds he had seemingly vanished from the face of the earth.

It was an hour before Allegoo was quite awake, and she lay for a while without stirring, so sweet was the new warmth at her breast. She pictured the boy in later years, when he had become a great hunter, and, like Aivick, the head of his tribe. As to the present shortage of food, she was not anxious, for there comes many an hour of fasting to those who must live by the strength of the arm and the sureness of the eye. No doubt Aivick would return ere night, and would bring home that which he sought.

In mid forenoon she was startled by the faintest possible tremor, which seemed to come from beneath her feet. Only a Husky could have felt it, and only to a Husky could its meaning be clear. She sat upright with a fluttering at her heart, and then, the child still at her breast, she crept out through the tunnel.

The air was clear now. Far to the south lifted a range of jagged hills, their tops already bare of snow, while northward stretched the glimmering ice, its vast counterpane broken by irregular pressure ridges that straggled confusedly out of sight. It was utterly lonely, utterly familiar. The sky was a hard blue, and untenanted by birds, it being not yet time for the great migrating flight from South America and

the Caribbean. Somewhere in this void Aivick sat, spear in hand, waiting for that single bubble which heralds the square flipper seal when he comes up to the surface for air.

Allegoo was vaguely wishing that he were already back, when something that crossed the ice like a black line, half a mile away, caught her eye. At that she began to run nervously forward. Presently she stood breathlessly at the edge of a new lane a hundred feet wide. The house of Aivick, the Caribou, had started on its journey to the Atlantic Ocean.

II

TWENTY miles away, where an overhanging cliff of basaltic rock thrust its great mass close to the rugged shore, a gigantic form, gaunt and yellow-white, moved uncertainly toward the ice. Beside it staggered its cub, now two months old. The two brutes, big and small, moved with a curious shuffling gait, swaying their arrow-shaped heads as if half blinded by the glare.

Here, in silence, darkness, and solitude, the she-bear had borne her young, fasting for months, while Unorri, the north wind, howled outside, and her lord traveled far to seek what food he could for himself. Now, savage with hunger, and drunk with the *pad, pad* of her great feet up and down the darkened chamber behind its blanket of snow, she sallied forth, stained, fearsome, and hostile, imbued with the nameless and terrible quality of maternity. There was naught in the Far North that would stand and face her; and she knew it.

The ice was some forty feet from the shore, and she hesitated before entering that chilly flood; but it was on the ice that she must find food. Dabbling a broad paw, she entered slowly, then turned a pink, inviting eye on her cub, who forthwith scrambled on her back. The rest was a matter of a few strokes. The cub leaped loosely, landed safe, straight over its mother's head, and was followed by her vast and dripping body. Then, sniffing the wind, they shambléd on.

By midday Allegoo had traversed half the boundary of the floe. It was a large field, probably three miles long, and must soon break into smaller sections. Watching the hills on shore, a slow motion was discernible, but as yet she felt no real fear, for this field must before long touch the others, and then Aivick would find his way back.

Meanwhile the chief thing was food. Her breast was a little cold.

She rounded a pressure ridge, and saw, a little way ahead, a yellow-white hummock that she knew was not ice. The blood suddenly throbbéd in her throat, and she crept back out of sight.

Close beside an air hole squatted the she-bear. The blackness of her nose was hidden beneath the whiteness of her paws, and the only thing that moved was when the wind lifted the long hair on the ridge of her backbone. Carved in snow was she, with every muscle tense, and the cub snuggled close against her side. Her breast, too, was feeling cold, and the mother instinct had filled her with a wild lust to kill.

Allegoo's black eyes peered steadily from behind the ridge. She knew that the beast would not move now, and into her mind crept a dull envy of this other mother. She had never thought of it before, but why were the she-bear's claws and brain so wise and strong and her own empty hands so weak? How was it that Aivick had not found this air hole for himself, instead of going miles away?

She held her son tighter against her heart, and waited. Perhaps there might be something left over.

Far down in the emerald depths floated a milky bubble. The pink eyes saw it, and an irrepressible quiver ran through the white bear's mighty form. The bubble moved upward, breathed from the lungs of the invisible square flipper, and vanished as it touched the surface. Still the bear moved not, nor did she stir when there appeared, framed in the glinting walls of the air hole, a round, sleek head and glossy shoulders.

The head projected, and a pair of large, soft, streaming eyes glanced curiously about. They saw but a motionless mound that looked like snow. Then one flipper swung upward. The seal twisted himself, got hold of the floe with the other flipper, and lurched forward. In the next moment he was halfway out.

But in that instant something happened. The bear's paw shot into action with the speed of lightning. The long, black claws were extended, and, with a motion too swift to follow, the great armed pad descended on the round and shining skull.

Strength beyond imagining, ferocity beyond thought, skill beyond description—all were in that blow. The seal saw and felt

nothing. There was just a quivering of the warm, wet body, and it lay limp.

The smell of hot blood drifted across the ridge, and Allegoo became conscious of a sudden insensate anger. She had not realized how hungry she was. Simultaneously the small dusky lips felt for her breast, but found no response. Her black eyes flashed, and her wild, strange soul rose in revolt.

This was a portion of motherhood at which she had never guessed. She did not dream that anything could have hurt so much. Two days now without food! And here was food—but not for her.

And yet perhaps there might be something left over. Her black eyes stared, unwinking.

The she-bear ate ravenously. She had been four months without meat, and her stomach was a cavern. She tore the seal to bloody rags, thrusting her sharp nose into the shrinking flesh, guzzling with a sort of famished madness. The ice beside her became a blood-stained shambles. In half an hour there were left only a few gory scraps.

Allegoo waited, still motionless. If the brute slept where it ate, she was ready to dare anything for those scraps of meat, so sharp had become the torment of her own body; but presently the great form heaved itself up and moved off, accompanied by the cub. A hundred yards away it slipped between two hummocks, and settled in a shapeless mound.

Allegoo caught her breath and crept forward. She was fingering a shred of meat, when overhead came the swoop of whistling pinions. An arctic eagle, the forerunner of the great host from the south, had scented the kill from a distance. It, too, was hungry.

The bird hung so close that the woman looked straight into its yellow eyes. The winds of Æolus were gathered into the hollow curves of the scimitar wings and the shrouded talons hooked under the gray down. The sun flashed on the ivory beak as it swept above her defenseless head, and for an instant Allegoo trembled. This huge bird was a stranger to fear.

Then there came at her breast the fumbling of helpless fingers, and all terror was washed out of her soul. She screamed, waved her arms, shouted words that had no meaning, and, squatting on the ice, began to eat ravenously. The eagle circled

twice, one filmed eye bent curiously on her, and then took its majestic course toward the hills.

III

THE woman slept that night. There had not been much left, but her hope was that the bear might kill again on the morrow.

Early in the morning an alarm came from the tassel of dew claws on the line that still dangled in the green depths, and Allegoo jumped eagerly toward it. There was a salmon on the other end, but after a tussle the fish got away, taking half the line. A wrinkle deepened on her dark brows as she pulled in what remained.

A little later she caught that one sound which in the Far North brings the most ominous message of all. It may be that something of its terror drifted into the child's ears, for he seemed to nestle the closer. It came again, mournful, relentless, and utterly unhuman—the call of the gray wolf when he takes the hunting trail. She pictured the tawny backs, the sharp, black, pointed noses, the lean, slaving jaws, and she knew that, though the she-bear might kill that day, there were those to whom all the wilderness gave place at the bloody table—when the white bear turned away.

Closer came the sound, till Allegoo caught the scratching of claws at the loosely sealed door. There were but eighteen inches of snow between them both and death.

Presently the leader of the pack, very wise in murder, gave a whimper, and the woman heard the grim chorus dwindle in the distance. Where was Aivick now?

All that day she sat, till again the pangs of hunger assailed her. It was torture to think that what she felt she also transmitted to the mite of humanity at her breast.

At midnight she stole out. There was enough moon to show the jagged hills rising into the sky like a black saw, and in the lee of the pressure ridges there were purple shadows that might harbor any danger. The floe had moved during the past few hours, and far to the north she discerned the loom of open water. Spring was working its way up from the Barren Lands, and the arctic ice was sliding toward the sea.

With a sudden and desperate impulse she began to run south. The gray wolves were there, but it would be solid land, where Aivick would have more chance of finding her. In an hour she came to the edge of the field. The land was a mile away.

There now seemed but one thing to do. If the she-bear was still on the floe, it would shortly kill again. It would be wise to watch the air hole; so Allegoo turned back, stumbling a little as she went, for she was very weary.

Edging cautiously along the ridge, she saw the big beast slouching northward with a lazy, rolling gait. There was nothing unfriendly about it now, and her pagan soul gave a throb of thankfulness. She reckoned that she could survive as long as the monarch of the Far North chose to make her home on this particular patch of ice.

In the days that followed she lived on the scraps from the white bear's table. Overhead the skies became populous with geese and swans, winging their mysterious flight toward the far islands of the arctic; but they stayed not on their way, whipping the thin air with worn and broken feathers that had borne them from the land of the coconut and the palm. And in these days there seemed to grow between the mother woman and the mother beast a strange and mutual understanding. No fear was left now. The bear killed and ate, to be followed shortly by a squat, broad figure that satisfied its hunger, and, with a long stare from almond-shaped eyes, stole back to its shelter of snow till again the urge for flesh should animate the white destroyer. It was a savage communion, with an ice field for an altar and the vast canopy of heaven for a shrine.

IV

At the end of the week the weather changed, and a great wind blew out of the north with a driving blast of fine flakes. Allegoo knew that the end was near when the bear, instead of making for the air hole, turned southward toward the shore. Her provider had gone now, and there was nothing left save to follow.

In twelve hours the floe had jammed against the solid land, and she felt the bare rock beneath her feet. Overhead towered the cliffs, whence had emerged the gray wolves, and, shuddering, she passed into their shadow. Where was Aivick now? The tiny fingers felt like ice upon her heart.

The sun was near the horizon when, far ahead, she heard that which at first she took for the terror of the Far North, the hunting pack in full cry; but, listening acutely, she presently distinguished the faint and furious barking of dogs. At that the

strength seemed to flow back into her body, and she hastened on.

It was an hour before she caught sight of something dark on the ice, half a mile from shore. Close by was what seemed to be a pillar of snow, around which were racing a group of gray specks; and then Allegoo understood.

In the middle of Aivick's maddened team towered a great she-bear, with a cub nestling between her flanks. The small ears were laid flat against the bony skull, and the black lips were drawn high. The terrible forearms projected, curved like those of a boxer, and in the small pink eyes blazed the light that dawns when a beast fights for her young. Twenty feet away crouched Aivick, gripping his spear, his chin thrust out, his face grim, as becomes the face of a hunter when he confronts the biggest quarry of all.

A dog dashed forward, snapped at the bear's side, and, just missing a mighty swing, swept past with a mouthful of white fur. Aivick shouted with excitement, and another dog plunged in. This time there was no mistake. A massive forearm caught the dog in the side, and it landed thirty feet away with a broken back.

The bear leaned a little forward, as if inviting the rest to come on; but Aivick would have no more of this. In the Far North a dog is too precious to waste, when one should be able to finish the job with a spear. He rapped out guttural words of command, and, dropping on one knee, waited for the bear to attack. He knew that the presence of the cub would goad her on.

The bear began to sway with a curious, rocking motion, looking now at her enemy, now at her cub. A queer lump rose in Allegoo's throat. She knew what the bear felt. Suddenly she was quite certain that this big brute was suffering as she herself had suffered. At that she threw all discretion away, and, running forward, put a trembling arm around Aivick's neck.

"Kah!" she cried chokingly. "Kah—do not kill! It is my sister!"

Aivick turned and stared. His eyes rounded, but he did not speak. Who could reply to a voice that one had thought was dead? Then, while a glad light dawned in his face, that other mother of the Far North lowered her gigantic form, and, with her young pressing close to her torn flanks, took her unhurried and formidable way into the vast silence of the arctic.

The Discard

A ROMANCE OF INDIA—THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A MAN
WHOM CIVILIZATION CAST OUT

By Kenneth Perkins

Author of "Queen of the Night," etc.

XXXII

OF all those who participated in the desperate combat at the Pungal River, Jeanne Béraud's point of view was perhaps the most dramatic. She could not see as much of what was going on as the others could, but she knew that that bloody series of events centered entirely about her.

The granite rock at the end of the island, to which the fugitives had retreated, was cleft in the middle, affording a space of about a yard in width and a few yards in depth, in which the girl and the old mahout found absolute safety. Ross stood at the mouth of the cleft, watching the jungle walls, first on one side of the river and then on the other.

The girl's eyes clung eagerly to every movement he made. As he stood there, in his tattered clothes, with his defiant chin covered with a thick stubble, his gray eyes narrowed fiercely, his gun in hand, he seemed not so much the desperate man he was, but rather a picture of heroic defiance.

It suddenly struck the girl, with a poignant thrill, that this man was defying an army, a whole state, the jungle. At the same moment she had a strange sort of conviction that he was unbeatable, that he was stronger than the overwhelming adversaries pitted against him.

Part of the combat she could see clearly. Reports from the bullets coming off shore increased. First there was the sharp crack of a rifle on one side, then another from the shore opposite. Ross, she noticed, seemed to have no fear of them—no, not even though one of the bullets splintered

the rock overhead, and ricocheted off with a dry, sputtering sound. That was Grimsby—so the mahout and Ross both cried.

The girl crept to the mouth of the cleft. She felt useless, miserable, and even worthless. Why was this man defying fate? Not for her, surely! She had told him without equivocation that she feared and hated him. He had shown no personal interest in the girl he was trying to save. He was standing there, defying the bullets, defying an army, for some intangible reason that he himself could not explain.

Another bullet splintered the edge of the boulder. Ross found this one dangerously near his head. He ducked.

"Why are you risking your life?" the girl cried, when he stepped back close to her. "What are you fighting for? I can't understand. Surely you aren't going to throw away your life for my sake?"

Ross was watching one of the horsemen, who had made off from the shore, riding into the current. In the tense moment of waiting while the native came closer, he answered the girl's question over his shoulder. His tone was almost bitter—perhaps because he himself saw the irony of fighting to the death for a woman who hated him.

"Any man would," he said.

She was startled at this answer. It was precisely the idea that she herself had rejected. Any man would fight for his mate, but here was a man fighting to save a woman merely because she was a woman!

"Yes!" she murmured to herself. She had been wrong. "I suppose any man would, but there aren't many men who would dare!"

The rider, taking advantage of Ross's

temporary retreat, urged his mount at a gallop into the river. Where the water was stirrup deep, the horse splashed to a slow walk. Ross waited until the man was half-way across the ford, and then sprang out into the open and fired.

The horse stumbled as its rider sagged forward across the pommel on its neck. A fusillade of bullets was drawn from both sides of the river, and Ross ducked back to the protection of the rock. From there the girl, the mahout, and Ross himself could see the riderless horse twisting like a hooked fish in the water, leaping up, and galloping over the shoal back to shore. Its rider stumbled waist deep and fell repeatedly, but finally reached the shore and dropped prone on the mud beach.

What happened then came with a suddenness that startled Ross—the youth who, as the mahout said, had decided to defy the stars.

Grimsby, it seemed, knew enough to hurl all his forces into an immediate concerted attack before the spectacular death of that first horseman, whom Ross had hit, could throw every man of them into a panic. The whole scene transpired in a flash, like a vivid nightmare, before the eyes of the girl. Through the cleft of the rock she could see the black shores simmering in heat, and the occasional flash of a white turban. She saw the sudden wild, hullabaloo of hundreds of crows, cawing and flapping out of the thick jungle, as a long skirmish line of horsemen, riding abreast, plunged out upon the open mud beach. She saw the line gallop forward and strike the water, sending up a line of foam, like a breaker on a seacoast. She saw them move toward the island with a loud splash, firing as they came. She saw the line become irregular, as some of the riders found deep water, and had to swim their horses.

Ross stood out in front of the rock, waiting—waiting until too late, it seemed to the girl. Then there was a rapid string of fire from his gun. She saw one man lurch from his horse. She saw another horse leap up out of the water, and then stumble, sending its rider headlong into the current. She saw the flash of the reports from their guns, and heard the bullets singing overhead. She saw blood on Ross's shoulder, but he still stood out there, meeting the charge of a whole regiment.

Then, all in the same vivid flash, she saw the line close in. The foremost horse-

men reached the dry mud of the island. She saw a turbaned head peering over the ledge of rock behind her. She felt the huge dhole dog—a powerful form that now seemed more like a cheetah than a dog—leap past her, knocking her to the rock wall. She had a momentary vision of a dark body hurtling through the air, and of fangs buried in a bleeding neck.

Then came the end. Another horseman reached the mud beach of the island, and fell forward as Ross's aim caught him squarely in the chest. There were riderless horses plunging in the water. There was a native lying on the rock, with his neck deeply torn by the fangs of a dog. There were horsemen plunging off—not in a line, this time, but in a confused mass, crowding to the narrow ford of shoal water.

She saw Ross standing there, his white jacket darkened from the wound in his shoulder, his mouth set in a grim, triumphant smile, his eyes blazing with ferocity, with surprise, with disappointment that his fun was so soon over!

Grimsby watched the retreat of his horsemen in a passion of anger and chagrin. After giving the command to advance, he had remained well secluded in the screen of vines, bamboo, and doob grass. He was not exactly a coward, nor was he in the habit of leading his men in their combats. Inasmuch as his exploits were almost exclusively of a criminal nature, he customarily directed his henchmen from under cover.

As they came blundering pell-mell back to the river bank, soaked in water, some of them wounded, and several horses running wildly without riders, Grimsby received them with howling oaths.

"Threw into a funk by a dorg!" he cried. "That's what happened! Lost yer nerve 'cos of a bloody 'ound, s'help me! What sort of a band is this, for hell's sake? Not 'orsemen! Not shikaris! A bunch of mateys and sweepers—that's all ye're good for, the 'ole lot! I'd 'ave yer all lined up and shot down if ye was worth the lead!"

One thing, however, Grimsby realized—Ross was trapped. There was little likelihood of his being so foolhardy as to attempt to leave the island and its impregnable rock.

Grimsby lit a cheroot and fumed off some of his anger. There was time—plenty of it. He commanded his defeated troopers

to deploy again, to take their posts along the bank, and to fire at intervals. He signaled to his men on the other side of the river to keep to their posts. They also were to fire.

"Keep the bloke in the cleft of that rock, where he belongs! When the sun sets, we'll try another way!"

They waited. As Grimsby told his men, time was no object with the attackers. If they could get the sahib no other way, they could starve him out. His elephant had splashed off down the river, taking the howdah and camping kit along with him. What ammunition Ross had was a matter of conjecture. At any rate, it could not be enough to fight the whole army of Pangal.

But something happened before sunset which made a considerable change in the whole trend of affairs. The rissaldar, captain of the Gaekwar's cavalry, arrived with the express command, delivered from the prince's mouth, that the white sahib was to be taken alive.

"That's a good one!" Grimsby roared, as the officer rode up to the river brink and gave him this bit of information. "Take that bloomin' rotter alive, will yer? All right, then! Make yer attack, captin', and see 'ow he gives himself up!"

The rissaldar considered the situation. The sky was overcast with a mist of deep crimson. The river flowed by, rippling over the shallow spots, and moving on again into an expanse of tawny monotone that turned to blood red, and then to black, as the moments wore on. The rissaldar's cavalry lined the bank—a numerous and imposing array. It was inconceivable that the force they had come out to combat was a lone man!

But there were other forces, which the rissaldar himself was quick to recognize.

"Is it not possible, sahib," he said to Grimsby, "that we are in the presence of death, and that this battle will be not between the Gaekwar's sows and one man, but between mortals and devils?"

"You've clicked there, captin'," Grimsby admitted. "There's death enough all over. He's bumped off a 'ndful already, damn him! Didn't know he could 'andle a gun that way. Lookee there, captin'!"

Grimsby pointed to two prostrate bodies on the mud of the island, and to another on the beach.

"And his bloomin' 'ound got another. Leaped out of the cleft of that rock and

hurled the bloke over like he was a bullock attacked by a wolf. 'Orrible! Devils, you say? I ain't so sure but you've clicked!"

"Then we must wait," the rissaldar said. He was touched with a bit of the Gaekwar's blood, and therefore inordinately superstitious. "Sacrifices must be offered and tom-toms beaten."

"And you'll offer up prayers that you can take that bloke alive, I suppose?" Grimsby said, this time with a touch of scorn. "Well, that ain't *my* game, captin'! No, sir—not mine! Ole Grimsby has a game of his own. The rotter ain't goin' to get away again. He's tricked me enough. I'm losin' my prestige with me henchmen; and that ain't to be allowed—not if ole Grimsby can help it. Start yer bally tom-toms, but Grimsby plays his own 'and!"

The rissaldar still remained undecided. Night was falling, and the pungent breath of the river and the jungle got into every man's lungs and blood. Remembering the vision of the girl as he had last seen her, in the similitude of death, the officer was thoroughly frightened, and so were his men. News spread among them with surprising rapidity, telling exaggerated stories of the terrific power of that white sahib and his mahoo.

The sahib, so they said, had stood up beneath a rain of bullets. They could see, even from the shores, how his white coat had turned red with his blood, but he had shown no fear.

Meanwhile Grimsby took the situation in his own hands. The whole of Pangal would be out there lining the river banks before morning, burning sacrifices to Kali. Already the tom-toms were throbbing.

"The Gaekwar thinks he'll take the bloke alive, does he? Well, he won't—not if Grimsby knows 'ow to shoot!"

The darkness fell. Grimsby dismounted and crept into the thicket. The brush extended far out on a spit of land, which marked the fording place. In the daytime this protection was useless, but at night it offered sufficient cover for a man crawling on his belly. Grimsby calculated that by crawling to the very end of the spit, where it jutted far out into the river, he could get a position near enough to the island to assure him of a reasonably certain aim.

He did this, hiding himself in the scant brush at the end of the spit. Here he waited for the moonlight. Then, if Ross so

much as thrust his head from behind the rock, one shot would get him.

XXXIII

FROM the cleft of the rock Ross, the girl, and Muhutma Daj looked out upon the black water. They could barely see the edge of the little island. Beyond it the moving river seemed merely a void, a tremendous depth of dank odors, passing in an endless sort of rhythm, which could be felt but neither seen nor heard. The tom-toms had started—the tom-toms that are beaten when any great disaster befalls a Hindu city—when cholera comes, or the plague, or when the sunnyassis proclaims that Kali demands tribute in human life.

They started softly and slowly, far off in the streets of Pangal. They moved closer, in an excruciating regularity of beat, like the beating pulse of a man in fever. They pervaded the air, as if weaving all the odors, the mists, the jungle sounds, into one harmony. They took possession of every man's consciousness. They entered into the blood of Gregory Ross, so that he felt as if his whole being was throbbing, just as his shoulder throbbed where it had been cut by a bullet.

A feeling of barbaric ecstasy went through him, as the girl was binding his wound. He was not paying any attention to the comparatively slight injury, or to the girl's anxious care for it. He was busy counting his rounds of ammunition, which he had ordered the mahout to lay in rows upon a piece of cloth.

Darkness came, and their faces were erased in a jet blackness. The mahout crawled off to a corner of the cleft, where he proceeded to eat a pellet of opium.

"When morning comes," he said philosophically, "I, Muhutma Daj, will be in Paradise!"

Whether he meant this in a figurative sense or not, Ross neither knew nor cared; but the announcement put a certain idea in his head.

"When morning comes—"

He lit a cheroot. The flare of the match illumined the girl's face, which was pale and frightened. Ross's voice had startled her. Was it possible that he thought he could fight no more?

"Your wound—" she began anxiously.

"Doesn't amount to a tinker's damn. A bit of blood gone. Those beastly tom-toms are beating just the same as my pulse.

I was going to say that when morning comes, I'll put up a jolly good fight!"

"Why were you counting those things?" asked Jeanne.

He could not see her pointing to the bullets.

"What things?"

"You had the mahout lay out all your ammunition."

"Oh, yes, yes!"

He did not answer further. She watched the light of his cheroot—the only sharp light in the jet-black void.

"You can't fight a whole race of men!" she cried. Her voice was peculiar. She might have meant just the opposite of what she said. In fact, Ross heard her say in an entirely different voice: "Can you defy everything? The whole—"

"Earth and sky," the mahout cackled from the darkness.

"Good God!" the girl cried. "I believe you actually think you can!"

Ross struck a match, and the girl could see him counting the line of cartridges on the white cloth. That might have been intended as his answer, to show that he did expect to go on defying the earth and sky. He would kill as many men as he had cartridges; but then what?

"There are many men in Pangal," the old mahout said calmly, "and there are many gods. You can frighten away the snakes by clapping your hands as you walk barefooted in the grass; but the deaf viper will not get out of your way, for he cannot hear, nor will the cobra, for he is too sluggish. Wherefore, sahib, do you clap your hands in your defiance against the gods? There are gods who are deaf, and others who are sluggish. Your defiance will avail you nothing. It is better that you two meet me in the morning in Paradise!"

The moon rose with a miraculous suddenness—a suddenness that brought with it a change not only in the jungle's visual aspect, but also in the rhythm of the tom-toms. Pangal seemed to have awakened to the imminence of a disaster.

The light—brilliant, although slightly diffused with the crimson mist—slanted across the rock, glaring full in the face of Ross. The girl now saw him as a picture of desperation, or, rather, of irritation. It was due to those damnable tom-toms.

The mahout was huddled off in the corner of the cleft, his face stony, his body settled down, shapeless and immobile.

"What he said is true," Ross announced, after an interminable silence.

The girl received this enigmatical announcement with a shock. The silence preceding it had been so long that the sentence was dismembered from what had been said before.

"What did the mahout say that is true?" she asked in bewilderment.

"It is better for you two to meet me in Paradise," Muhutma Daj himself repeated.

The girl looked up into Ross's face. After the jet blackness, the influx of moonlight seemed extraordinarily brilliant. She could see, by his look, that he meant just one thing. It was the one thing that all three had known only too well since the very first moment they had been cornered on the little mud islet. Ross would have to lose; and the more men he killed, the greater would be his punishment when they took him.

He still seemed to be obsessed with that little line of cartridges.

"I am going to fight until the last one—no, not until the last one, but until these two." He took two of them from the end of the line. "I won't let them take me," he said more or less indifferently. The other two knew that already. So did the host of natives on shore, and so did Brian Grimsby. "Nor shall the Gaekwar ever put his hand upon you," he added.

Ross himself was astonished at the extraordinary calm with which the girl took this. After she had gone into hysterics at the mere sight of Ross's unshaven face, and the touch of his hand, here she was accepting a sentence of death with a look of absolute placidity!

As she reached out for the cartridge that was to be hers, Ross withdrew his hand impulsively. The thought of it was too hideous. The picture of so beautiful an object—of such perfect skin—of that fragile temple, which the moonlight touched with a sort of transparent radiance—to destroy such loveliness was too ghastly to think of!

The mahout must have watched this little drama with a remarkable understanding; for, as Ross drew back, he saw thrust between him and the girl a withered old hand, with fingers askew like claws. In the mummified palm Ross saw a small pile of opium pellets.

"When I said 'Paradise,'" Muhutma Daj croaked, "I meant this!"

Ross and the girl stared. The offer had been made precipitously, but it all seemed a simple matter now. They were no longer baffled, terrified by the crowd of natives, by the horror that was biding its time just beyond the shore of the islet. Their minds jumped to the same conclusion.

"These pellets, sahib," the mahout said, "offer the only approved method of conquering the stars!"

The girl reached eagerly for them. Ross seized her hand. All three were there with hands meeting.

"Absurdly simple, the whole confounded business!" Ross agreed. "Just an overdose of this stuff, and we will both be safe from the Gaekwar!" He swept the pellets into the palm of his own hand and poured them into his pocket. "But I have no intention of letting you have these yet," he told the girl.

The mahout shook his head. He gibbered strange things in his own language. Whatever the mantras he was uttering meant, Jeanne thought she knew what he was saying. She had heard words which would have been uttered in the same tone of mingled wonderment and scorn.

"Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow, or will he harrow the valleys after thee? He scorneth the multitude of the city. He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword."

Ross stood up, inspected his pistol again, to make sure that it was full, and then went out from the cleft of the rock, to see what the moonlight could reveal.

Brian Grimsby, secluded in the tussock of grass at the edge of the spit, and within easy range, was waiting for this moment.

XXXIV

THE Gaekwar of Pangal, waiting in the dark, smoky dallan of his house, heard the pulsating rhythm of the tom-toms. They had the same effect on him as they had on all the natives who heard them—that is to say, they gave him a feeling of impending disaster.

A woman had been raised from the dead—that much of the tidings that spread about the city the Gaekwar already knew; but it was not until a messenger came to him from his captain of cavalry that he realized the full drama of the situation.

The white sahib had taken the girl of the miracle to a mud islet in the middle of

the Pangal River, near the flat rocks where the dhobis brought their washing. Crowds had assembled. Grimsby Sahib himself had brought his henchmen and attacked the fugitives in their stronghold, but the white sahib had repulsed all onslaughts with such bravery as to give him the semblance of an incarnation of Arjuna, the heavenly warrior.

But how about the cavalry? This seemed to puzzle the old Gaekwar. His cavalry was something of which any ten-lac rajah might have been proud. Was it possible that this white sahib, single-handed, could prevail against the king's horses and the king's men?

Apparently it was quite possible, for the white sahib had prevailed for hours, by the simple method of hiding in a cleft of a rock which jutted up from one end of the islet.

"It is strange," the Gaekwar said, in Telugu; "but the gods must be on the side of this young man. If they are with him, what does it profit any man—or the whole city—to be against him?"

"Not gods, but devils," the messenger objected; "for the woman he has with him has been raised from the dead."

Yes, that was very possible. The Gaekwar's curiosity concerning the whole affair was beginning to be aroused. It was more exciting, the drama down there by the river, than the cockfights, the nautch dancing, the feast of that evening. Whatever the conflict was between gods, devils, or men, the old Gaekwar was unable to stay in his dallan any more that night. He ordered one of his largest state elephants saddled, and, with an escort of sowars, started out for the river.

He got there very close to the moment when Gregory Ross made that extraordinarily risky move of stepping out into the moonlight to study the position and number of his adversaries. He was in time to witness a scene that convinced him of a truth which he had suspected all along—he and his people, his horsemen and the crowds on the river bank, were eyewitnesses to a combat not between man and man, but between man and the gods.

Grimsby Sahib, under cover of darkness, had attained a strategic position which his henchmen, during the daylight, had found it impossible to reach. He had waited there, in a hiding place afforded by a mere tussock of grass. The moon had come up,

and his position was no longer safe, but all he needed was one glimpse of Ross. A single shot, he was convinced, would bring his man down.

The awaited moment came. Ross stepped out into the open, conscious that he was safe from the uncertain fire of the distant shores, but unaware that an enemy had crept out to the end of that long, narrow spit.

Grimsby was deliberate. It would not do to miss that first shot, and to give away his dangerous position by his gun flash; but as he raised the weapon, he was aware that his hand was trembling violently. That was due, perhaps, merely to the excitement of this moment—a superbly dramatic one, from his point of view, for it seemed that the whole of Pangal had lined the river bank to watch his deed.

Perhaps, too, it was accentuated by the coming of the old Gaekwar himself, in more or less state, and by the sight of the giant elephant which the prince was riding. That brought back to Grimsby's mind his pet obsession. The little runt elephant with the red eyes had gone down the river, and had landed God only knew where.

Another reason for Grimsby's sudden hysteria was the fact that the low moon had cast the shadow of an elephant on the placid, muddy flow of the stream directly in front of him as he raised his gun. The weapon dropped from his hand. That shadow was not caused by any elephant on the bank, but by one directly behind Grimsby himself!

There were shouts from the shore of "Yarni! Yarni!" and a confused, terrified babel of voices. Out of the river, first like a giant gaval, like a behemoth, then looming up in its own shape, had come Ross's runt elephant. The night made it seem huge—as huge as the great beast upon which the Gaekwar was sitting.

Grimsby wheeled about with a howl, backed away, stooped to pick up his gun, and then plunged into the water. A long, sinuous thing reached out for him, like a boa constrictor. It crept smoothly about his shoulder and under one arm. He felt himself floating upward. The whole plane of the river banks, the surface of the water, the jungle horizon, seemed to be suddenly tilted so that there was no more gravity, no form, no order. The world had rushed pell-mell into a space of many lights, of glaring moons—of a spasm, infinite but

momentary, which subsided into oblivion and eternity.

Ross saw this finale—a body hurled with skull crashing against one of the rocks of the river bank. To Ross it meant the only escape from the power of Brian Grimsby.

The Gaekwar saw it. To him it meant, obviously enough, the judgment of a local god; and in this last opinion the mahout, Muhutma Daj, and all the people on the banks coincided.

Grimsby had been weighed in the balances and found wanting.

In the consternation of the throngs on shore, every one overlooked the one detail that was most important. Muhutma Daj, his fear centers entirely drugged by opium, plunged into the shoal water, crept up to the spit, and then ran after his elephant.

It was perhaps the only psychological moment during the whole of the combat when the old mahout could have accomplished this feat. His elephant had caused something of a panic among the crowd, as well as among the horses; and when the troopers saw him calling to his murderous beast, there was not a man there so foolish as to shoot him.

The Gaekwar, in fact, as well as his res-saldar and other officers, shouted to his men not to touch the little mahout. When he had got the elephant, which no doubt was mad, under control, then there would be time enough to shoot him.

The beast, however, did not quite live up to the reputation he had started to build for himself. At the voice of Muhutma Daj he foundered down to his knees, settling in the mud like a huge barge, and spraying his forehead with the water. Immediately a dozen men leaped forward, pouncing on the little mahout like a pack of wolves, and dragging him, wailing and screaming, into the presence of the Gaekwar.

This, as a matter of fact, was the end which the mahout had in view. He knew perfectly well that he could not break through the lines. All he wanted was to get as far as the old ruler.

"Keep him away!" the Gaekwar cried to his men. "Keep him far enough off so that the moon will not cast his shadow upon my elephant, nor upon my horses, nor upon my men, nor upon anything which is mine! This man is in league with the jungle devils, and to be touched by him is to be touched as if by a leper!"

The sepoys holding him stepped back, leaving the little huddled figure to squat in the caked mud before the Gaekwar's elephant.

"Before you kill him," said the prince, "let me question him concerning his deeds."

The little mahout squatted there silently, his drug losing part of its effect after his plunge into the river. He lifted up his face, which was a ghastly yellow, and his eyes, which were dilated and glittering.

"Have mercy upon me, a heap of filth!" he cried. "I come into the presence of my lord the king, bringing a message from the white sahib, who is my lowly and reprehensible master."

"I will hear no message from him!" the Gaekwar spat out irascibly. "He must surrender to my horsemen. If that is his message, then let him come to me, and we will put chains upon him. The woman whom he holds in his possession we will take to the gates of the city, and to my household!"

"King of kings, unfortunately that is not my master's message," the mahout quietly rejoined.

"Then I will tear them both limb from limb!" the Gaekwar screamed, with the petulance of a thwarted child.

"It will avail you nothing. After the white sahib has fired his last shot and your men advance, both he and the woman will already have passed into eternity."

The Gaekwar beat with his jeweled fists upon the sides of the howdah. He swore the most terrible oaths of vengeance—at which the circle about the elephant widened, leaving the two aged men, the prince and the mahout, alone together.

The former looked down over the edge of his howdah, and for a moment vented his passion in choking breath and snarling oaths. When he had in a measure collected himself, he beckoned to the accursed pariah, as he called him, to come closer.

"To what end is it that your master defies the firmament and all things that are the handiwork of Brahma?"

"There is divinity in all men. All men fight against gods—except their own."

"His own? What unknown god has this heap of offal?"

"This heap of offal is built in the image of the heavenly warrior," protested Muhutma Daj. "No other man in my years have I seen built in that image—save only one."

The Gaekwar raised his hand. He, too, was thinking of a youth whom they had called an incarnation of Arjuna. "Save only one," repeated the old mahout—"the first-born of my lord the king!"

For a long time the Gaekwar did not answer. There was a silence over the crowd about them, broken only by the slight breath of wind in the dry tamarind leaves and the champing of horses. When the Gaekwar spoke, he had modulated his voice so that only the man down on the ground before him could hear:

"You say they will both be dead when I find them?"

"That was the sahib's message, oh, king!"

The Gaekwar shook his head slowly—so slowly that the white feathers of his turban waved gracefully back and forth.

"There is no necessity for them both to die."

"Which one will my lord the king set free?"

"I will set the youth free," the Gaekwar replied.

He waited, thinking that the mahout would bow down to the dust with thanks for this mercy; but for some reason or other the little man remained there, squatting like an immobile toad in the dust.

"I said I would set the youth free," the Gaekwar repeated sharply; "but let the mem-sahib be brought to me. This bargain will I offer—and it is greater mercy than I have ever yet shown!"

Muhutma Daj shook his head.

"I am a son of two dogs," he cried piteously, "and my master is a scurvy rascal! But, protector of the needy, the mercy you offer will be rejected."

This time the old prince was too much astonished to give in to anger. What did this measly little heap of carrion mean? Was it possible that his master had been crazed by the jungle swamps, or was the little mahout himself out of his head?

"You are an eater of opium and a dreamer of dreams!" the Gaekwar said. "You do not seem to understand that I am offering this man his freedom—his life!"

"He will not accept it."

"Any man will accept it!"

"Not this man—if it entails the surrender of his woman."

"His woman? Is she then his mate?"

"Not his mate," the mahout said.

"That part I myself cannot understand.

My master, the white sahib, worships peculiar gods. He would do this for any woman."

The Gaekwar broke out into a laugh. What lunacy! But the laugh dwindled into a silence of uncertainty and wonder.

"This precept," he said, still in a scoffing tone, "which stipulates that a man must protect a woman even at the expense of his own life, is probably ordained by the white sahib's so-called unknown god."

"That is my understanding," the mahout said.

"Well, then, blind man, dolt, son of swine, I will prove that you are wrong! I will show you that the white men have no gods, that this precept is not a precept laid down by gods or devils, but merely a collection of words as meaningless as the sounds of the parrots in the jungle!"

The Gaekwar raised his voice, calling to his captains and headmen to come closer.

"Be it understood what mercy I, the king, offer to this white sahib who has raised his hand against us. I shall give his mem-sahib up, and she may go from out the state by any route she sees fit to travel. Nor shall any man molest her; but in return for this concession the white sahib who has raised his hand against us shall give himself up to be put to death!"

"Must I deliver this message?" the old mahout asked in a cracked, piping voice.

The Gaekwar nodded.

"And if your master accepts my offer, you shall be rewarded as a man of consummate wisdom, as a mahatma and sage!"

"I shall be rewarded, then," the mahout said; "for my master will take this course, and this only—to give up his life for the safety of the mem-sahib."

"That remains to be proved," the Gaekwar said dryly.

XXXV

HAVING now attained the immunity—as well as the dignity—of an emissary of the king, Muhutma Daj was allowed to depart. He took with him the runt elephant, which, as he explained to the Gaekwar, would serve as a means of transportation for the mem-sahib.

When Ross saw him approach in the moonlight, with the elephant wading across the shoal water toward the mud island, he was surprised and incredulous. Had the old Gaekwar made some miraculous sort of capitulation? A single sight of the ma-

hout's face, as he led the animal up on the dry ground, assured Ross that his tidings were not good.

The girl came to the opening of the cleft in the rock, eager to find out just what had happened. Ross, already aware that the Gaekwar's sentence would offer them no hope, went out to meet the mahout, and spoke to him in a low voice.

"Whatever you've got to tell me, don't let her hear," he warned.

"Indeed, sahib, the message I bring is an evil one," the mahout began. "The Gaekwar, whose patron goddess is Kali, is not satisfied until his adversaries are dead at his feet."

"You told him that we are not afraid of death? You told him that he would find us dead, before we would let him take us?"

"I did, and he was terrible to behold in his anger. Then he thought that he was cheated, and he devised an answer."

"Keep your voice low, and tell me."

"He said that both of you need not perish. He will show thus much mercy—that one of you may depart in peace." Ross's face lit up with mingled incredulity and triumph. "It is for you to choose. If you give the mem-sahib to him, he will permit you to go where you will. If you do not wish to give her up to him, then you must die yourself, but she may go where she will."

"Good God! Then it means we've won!" He took the little old man by the shoulders. "Look here, you aren't dreaming? It's true?" He began to shout in his exultation. "It's true? You aren't dreaming those damned opium dreams? The Gaekwar said it in those very words?"

The mahout showed no emotion.

"You do not seem to understand," he told Ross. "In order that the mem-sahib may go free, you must die."

"But will the Gaekwar keep his word?" Ross asked eagerly. "Will he let her go, after I—"

"After you lay down your life? Yes—he will keep his word. He gave it before his lords, his headmen, and his captains. The Gaekwar is jealous of his word, as you yourself have found out in the past. He will keep it."

"I thank God!"

Ross said the words fervently. They came from the depths of his soul. After all his failures, here was one triumph accorded to him. Destiny had thwarted every

act. Mankind had discarded him. He was worthless—a derelict that could reach no port, that could carry no cargo; but here at last the splendid moment had come!

As soon as he had awakened to the full purport of this glorious fact, Ross turned abruptly and ran to the rock cave, to tell the girl that she was free. The mahout shook his head in desperation. Was it possible that his master persisted in misunderstanding him? Was it possible that he—a man—was about to give up his own life for a woman? Women are an abomination in this life, as well as in the life to come. A widow who has borne none but women children must be burned without rites. No, most assuredly the young man could not have understood!

The expression on the mahout's face had warned Ross, when he first saw the little fellow returning from the Gaekwar, that the prince had rejected his plea; but the expression on the face of Ross himself, as Jeanne Béraud saw him, was different. It was flushed with victory.

The girl was completely blinded to the actual situation. At the very first glance at Ross, she felt certain that all their troubles were over. The moonlight fell directly upon what had seemed to her, till now, a face of unusual desperation and ferocity. In that soft light she saw that it had become radiant, as if illumined with a burning heat—not ferocious, but tenderly passionate.

"What I am going to say I must say quickly," he told her; "and we must act quickly, without considering the reasons. Do not ask questions. Promise me that first!"

She stood dumb with surprise, but not at what he had said. She was still gazing raptly at the extraordinary transformation of his face. The light was superb, as he stood bent close to her. The moonbeams threw his every feature into a soft relief. She could see a smile through his dark stubble of beard—a smile at the corners of his mouth, and in his gray eyes, which were now dilated and soft.

"Promise me!" he repeated. When she had assented wonderingly, he hurried on. "You are to climb up there into the howdah. Old Muhutma will take you out—outside." Ross pointed eastward, toward the Ghats. "Anywhere you want to go, he will take you. No one will stop your course—that is understood. The Gaekwar

has given his word, before every one. You are to have safe passage out."

"Am I to go alone?" she asked in a startled voice.

"Muhutma Daj—"

"Yes, that may be, but you—"

"You promised not to wait to have this all explained."

"But I must have it explained!" she cried, clutching at his arm. "Where are you going? I don't care about the mahout. Where are you going?"

"It is arranged—" He hesitated, but then added, without losing his fervent tone: "I also am going—out there!"

She moved closer to him, fixing her eyes intently upon that strangely handsome face. He expected her to burst out suddenly into a scream, for she was breathing hysterically. Her hand clutching his arm—a small, weak hand—seemed to have strength enough to tear out a tendon.

As she looked into his face, she seemed to have satisfied herself on one point—he was telling the truth. Everything proved it—the light burning in his eyes, the glorious enthusiasm of his smile, the vibrant tone of his voice. She was looking at a man who had won a great victory!

He felt a change come in the frantic clutch of her fingers. Then he heard her say in a confident tone:

"Where shall we meet?"

"Where—where?" he stammered. "Yes, I am to meet you, of course—that is all arranged." Again he pointed to the Ghats, which were fairylike in a green haze. "Out there!" He put up his hand as she was about to speak. "No more questions!" he told her. "Muhutma Daj will tell you where we are to meet."

She took his hands, and they stood there for a moment. No, it could not be denied. What he had said rang true, every word of it. He had achieved a great triumph. She could feel it like a current passing into her hands from his. Finally she burst out:

"Then you *have* conquered the stars?"

Ross laughed, but it was a laugh of confidence, as if he felt that his victory was as glorious as defying the stars themselves, and winning.

XXXVI

MUHUTMA DAJ brought the elephant to his knees. Ross swung the girl up to the howdah. He then drew the old herder aside.

"I won't see you again, either," he said.

"Got to call this a settling of our account, you know. There are two possessions of mine—the old gunda and this dog. They've proved themselves not discards, but priceless. You shall have them. Don't let the dog follow me. Get out of sight as quick as you can. I don't want any scene. It would be beastly if she—up there—found out!"

That was all. Ross desired no further ceremony. It was a moment pregnant with drama, but Ross smoothed it over. The parting proved surprisingly easy, except that he winced when the dog tugged at its chains and started yelping as its master left.

From a distance the Gaekwar had watched the scene, at first with complete disbelief, then with chagrin, then in a fit of violent anger. Was it possible that the young white man would do such a mad thing? No, it was too preposterous! The heat had crazed him. The river mists had given him a fever.

And yet there he was, fording the river, waist deep in the black current, coming steadily on, while the whole throng on the river bank watched him in the moonlight. It meant that the mem-sahib, now in the howdah on the runt elephant, with a mahout seated before her, could go free. That was the bargain. That was the king's word. It was inviolate. In his misjudgment of a crazed man's motives and character he had lost the prize!

Ross stood before the Gaekwar's state elephant, looking up at the beast's broad, painted forehead, at his gold tipped tusks, at the gilded howdah with its studded harness, at the eagle-eyed, wrinkled, majestic old man seated above.

The Gaekwar spoke, and a high caste clerk translated.

"His highness wishes to know why you have come."

"Why I have come!" Ross exclaimed. "Confound it all, what does he ask that for? I've come to give myself up, as you see—unarmed."

"His highness says that you have performed a very peculiar deed. He cannot believe, nor can any of the headmen present believe, that you have done this thing without a motive."

"I have done it. The bargain is made. I am fulfilling my part."

The Gaekwar, upon hearing this translated, shook his head.

"He bids me tell you that he cannot believe you are laying down your life for a woman."

Ross folded his arms and waited. Nothing had been said in their treaty concerning the explanation of motives. He stood there ready for whatever form of execution the bloodthirsty old potentate might choose.

"The Gaekwar bids me say that peradventure there is a certain situation in which a man will fight for a woman—that is to say, when she is his mate. Under such conditions he would fight for her as he would fight for anything that was his own—his son, his horse, his buffalo, his house."

"The woman," Ross replied coolly, "is not my mate."

"In that case," the clerk said, after consultation with his highness "you are laying down your life for a precept."

"Devil take it all, yes!" Ross cried impatiently. "Put it that way, if you wish!"

"His highness bids me tell you that if you are laying down your life for such a cause, you will be blessed in the hereafter, for the gods look with favor upon such an act."

Ross darted a searching glance at the majestic figure up there in the moonlight. Could it be that there was yet hope? But the Gaekwar saw the expression which had suddenly come to the young man's face, and he shook his head.

The translator repeated the command that was then given:

"His highness has spoken. He has said before his lords and headmen that if you gave up your life, the mem-sahib was to be freed. He has suffered the mem-sahib to go, and therefore, according to the stipulation, you are sentenced to death."

Ross took this in silence, and with apparent equanimity.

"The Gaekwar states further that death is the only end you deserve, for you have slain certain of his subjects, who were members of the Grimsby Sahib's band. Therefore let it be understood by you, as well as by all others who have heard his words, that the Gaekwar's sentence is a just one."

Ross had nothing further to say. Just or unjust, his voice could not now be raised in protest. As he looked about the ring of silent spectators, he saw for the first

time that a firing squad of sipahis had been drawn up within about fifty yards of the state elephant.

"The execution is to take place to-night," the translator continued. "His highness has so spoken. It shall take place now."

The squad of soldiers advanced at a command from the ressalidar.

It is not the custom of Hindu potentates to ask a final statement from the condemned; but Ross himself spoke to the translator.

"Tell His Highness the Gaekwar that I have won," he said quietly.

This was translated, and the old man in the silver-studded howdah asked to have it repeated several times. Then, as the crowd was cleared away before the range of the firing squad, the Gaekwar directed his elephant herder to bring the beast to its knees. Another attendant placed a bamboo ladder to the howdah. The prince stepped down, and walked over to the condemned man.

It seemed that of all that throng the Gaekwar and Gregory Ross were of a like height. Both were tall and imposing, one in gorgeous silken coat, tight-fitting trousers, and feathered turban, the other just as majestic, clothed only in bloodstained whites. A few feet away, seeming infinitely smaller as he stood in a sand furrow, was the third member of the trio—the translator, with a skullcap, a black jacket, and a dhoti about his loins.

As the translator spoke, the Gaekwar looked at Ross from under beetling white brows.

"The king says that your fight has been a heroic fight. The soul within you is like the soul of his first-born. It is for this reason that he desires to have you die a noble death, as if you had the blood of a prince in your veins."

The ceremony that followed was unbelievable to any except those who understood the extraordinary whimsicality, the barbaric passion, of the aged ruler. As a symbolic acknowledgment that he regarded Ross not as a renegade white man, but as a princely warrior, the Gaekwar took off his outer robe and threw it over the white man's shoulders. It was a robe of green silk richly embroidered in gold, and it was conferred upon the condemned man as a khilat, or garment of distinction.

Not only this, but the ruler placed a necklace of rubies about Ross's neck, and

clasped a bangle of jewel-studded gold about the young man's arm.

During the strange ceremony there was not a breath from the throng gathered about. The chirags, borne by attendant coolies, smoked and flared, sending wavering lights and shadows through the picture, so that although every one stood motionless, each man seemed to be whirling in a riot of color. Ross felt that he was the central figure in a feverish dream.

The old Gaekwar looked at the young prince he had created. He looked searchingly, his black, eaglelike eyes burning with many memories and sorrows. Yes, the white man looked every inch a prince! No man had seemed so much a reincarnation of the ruler's son, who had died at this youth's age, many years ago.

A single cry of a parrot in the tamarinds was followed by a deathlike silence. It was a silence so deep that every man or woman who had come to the banks of the Pangal River could hear the cry of pain, intense, voiceless, that came from the old Gaekwar's throat. Many could see him cover his face with his scrawny, heavily jeweled hands. His lords, his captains, his headmen, must not look upon the face of their king when its regal aspect is distorted in emotion.

They waited respectfully, confident that this fit of emotion would pass by. The ressaldar likewise waited, for it was necessary for the old king to step back a few paces, so that the white sahib would be standing alone. Then the officer would give the signal to his sipahis to fire.

XXXVII

WORD had already been signaled to the other side of the Pangal River that the mem-sahib was to go unmolested. Grimsby's horsemen, who were still guarding that shore of the ford, gave the place a wide berth as they saw the runt elephant coming toward them. Jeanne Béraud, swinging aloft in the howdah as the elephant waded through the black water, found nothing on the farther shore to obstruct her path.

Yes—there were those terrifying granite horses, immobile and innocuous, and they threw the elephant into a momentary panic; but the skillful old mahout, Muhutma Daj, urged the beast past them.

The girl could not take her eyes from that distant scene on the other side of the river. Beyond the mud islet, which now

looked like little more than the back of a crocodile above the moonlit water, she could see a line of flaming red lights—the chirags held by the Gaekwar's coolies. The only detail that stood out in the throng of white turbans and black bodies was the garishly painted forehead of the state elephant. The scene was barbaric, weird. Perhaps because of a delicate intuition, the girl was frightened.

"What will they do with him? Why did he go there? Why didn't he come with us?" she asked, just as they were about to plunge into the black jungle.

"It is not for me, Muhutma Daj, to answer a woman's riddles," the mahout replied. "One duty only remains for me—to take you out of this principality."

This not only enhanced her fears, but it piqued her curiosity as well. The hunched little fellow sat there with his back to her, the very picture of inscrutability. When she spoke to him, she felt as if she were questioning an oracle.

"You will answer one question," she said sharply. "I don't care if you never speak another word, but this one thing you will tell me!"

The hunched back swinging along with the movement of the elephant's neck gave no sign of any reaction to her anger.

"Shall I see him again?" she cried in a desperate voice. "Answer that one question, or I will hurl myself from this howdah! Shall I ever see him again?"

"You will see him again," the oracle replied, "in Paradise."

The girl leaped forward, reaching across the bamboo rim of the howdah and clutching the man's shoulders.

"Then it's true!" It was like a voiceless scream. "It's true! I might have known it! Good God, why was I so blind? But he seemed so triumphant, I had to believe him!"

She forced the little man to turn about and face her.

"Tell me the truth, Muhutma Daj! I will not go with you. I am stronger than you, and I will fight! You cannot take me away from him against my will!"

Muhutma Daj was no longer the inscrutable figure of Buddha. He realized that he was facing a woman whom some frenzy had transformed into a tigress.

"Tell me the truth! What has he done? Why am I freed in this way, alone? What do they want of him?"

"Do not tear my weak old shoulders apart, mem-sahib! Harken to me, and I will tell all. The dice are cast. The gods have laid their wagers. It is not for you, a mem-sahib, to play against them, as he did."

Again she poured out a babel of frenzied questions. The mahout winced at her vehemence.

"I will tell all! I will tell all!" he wailed. "The Gaekwar desired to prove that no man will lay down his life for a woman, and he wagered a great wager in order that he might prove it. He said that if the sahib came to him willing to die, he would give you up. You were the price he paid. Forevermore it will be recorded that there was a man who laid down his life in order that a woman should be saved."

For a moment too much astounded to act, the girl could merely murmur:

"He did this for me, even though there was no love!"

"Now, therefore," the old mahout concluded, turning about again and prodding the elephant's shoulder with the ankus, "you are free!"

"Stop! Wait! I tell you, stop! I am not free! I love him—that is why I am not free! I love him! Before God, I love him! Stop! I will go back and die at his side!"

The mahout held up his hands in desperation. Surely women were an abomination forever, and rightly it was ordained that a man with only women children cannot be saved from the hells hereafter! Angrily he dug the goad into the elephant's shoulders, and pounded the animal's withers with his knuckles and heels.

The elephant plunged on into a labyrinth of grass, vines, and bamboo. It rolled up its trunk angrily, unrolled it, and let out a frightened trumpeting.

The girl leaped over the edge of the howdah and swung herself down into a tussock of waist-high grass. She heard the confused yelling of the mahout, the trumpeting of the elephant, and the frantic barking of Ross's dog. These sounds were in her ears as the mahout and the two animals receded into the jungle.

It was the last she ever heard of Muhutma Daj, or of the strange consorts of Gregory Ross.

Guided by the distant points of crimson light which were the Gaekwar's smoking chirags, Jeanne Béraud tore back through

the thick brush toward the river. The tough blades of grass cut her skin, and the thorns ripped her clothes, as she stumbled on in the darkness. She found the huge granite horses, sentinels against the jungle devils, looming above her in a confusing pattern of darkness and moonbeams. She stumbled on, coming abruptly to a black void from which there rose an overwhelming breath of dank water.

Into this void she plunged, finding herself waist deep in a warm current. She staggered on, her feet sinking into soft ooze, her hands splashing with a breast stroke against the water, her naked shoulders cutting through the scum and slime of the opposite shore.

She was confused, at first, at the barbaric splendor of the scene that was now before her eyes. The smoking torches were so close as to illumine certain details vividly, while they threw others into blackness.

By their flare she saw the state elephant, gaudily painted, its huge tusks a glaring white, its form gigantic in comparison with the dwarf elephant which the girl had been riding. She saw a line of sipahis standing with their rifles ready. They were a tattered crew, not drawn up in regular formation, but each man standing as he pleased, yet all of them were obviously prepared to fire at a signal.

In the center of the picture, but well removed from the background of black bodies and white turbans, she saw two men, both of whom seemed to be royal princes. Then she knew that in her frenzied scrutiny of the throng she had found the one she wanted, for one of those two princes was Gregory Ross.

Screaming for fear that the sipahis would perform their terrible duty before she could intervene, she leaped up the bank, ran across the grass, and hurled herself into Ross's arms.

The soldiers, their captains, and the assembled headmen vented cries of amazement. The Gaekwar himself stepped back, piping out at first in surprise, if not in fear, but then growing angry.

"What is this woman who comes to stay a king's word?" he cried to his men. "Ask her, in whatever tongue she speaks, or the sipahis shall slay two instead of one!"

The girl heard nothing of these words, nor did it matter that she could not understand them.

"I've come to die—with you!" she said.

Ross himself was struck dumb, but a swift sensation of utter defeat suddenly swept over him. Was his death, then, to be in vain, after all?

"It is a river devil breathed up out of the night to stay the execution!" the headmen cried.

Indeed, this was a plausible explanation, judging from the girl's appearance, with her torn clothes clinging to her body, and her naked arms and shoulders slimed with weeds. One of the men spoke up angrily above the uproar.

"It is no water spirit, but a woman!" he cried. "It is even the mem-sahib, the daughter of the French planter! Bid me give the command to my men!"

The Gaekwar held up his hand.

"Not yet. This cannot be a mem-sahib. Her beauty is not the beauty of woman-kind, but of the gods!"

Ross would not have been reassured if he had heard this. He clung tightly to the girl as he watched the Gaekwar's glittering eyes. Yes, it seemed certain that the game was lost, that victory had been snatched away!

"Take the mem-sahib and let her be imprisoned in your zenana, as was your desire!" the ressalidar cried impatiently. "Suffer me to give the command!"

The Gaekwar shook his head.

"No, I shall not take her. Her beauty is not the beauty of mortals. She is transfigured. Did I not hear that you yourself"—he turned to the ressalidar—"witnessed with your own eyes that this girl was dead? And here she is arisen! Can a man take to his zenana a woman who has been raised from the dead?" The old prince was quick to see the bystanders thrusting their tongues into their cheeks. "No? You think, then, that she was not dead? Very well, then, she has come, because of her great love, to commit suttee. Can any man, before the gods, take a woman who is about to immolate herself upon the pyre of her husband? No! I shall not take this woman who has come, in the spirit of suttee, to die with her lord!"

The Gaekwar stepped away and joined his ressalidar. Again the crowd divided, so as to leave the ground within range of the sipahis free.

"Tell her," the Gaekwar concluded, "that she has found favor in the sight of the gods for this act. Tell her that I, the Gaekwar of Pungal, do pronounce that this

woman is a holy woman, and will be blessed through eternity!"

"Then is he to die?" the girl asked pitifully, when this was translated.

The Gaekwar appeared not to hear this question. His white brows were knitted, giving him an expression of satanic cruelty, rather than of indecision.

Then he answered. Ross and the girl both heard the translation:

"His highness says that you will not die, sahib, for the bullets of the sipahis will melt harmless against your flesh."

"I do not understand," replied Ross.

The Gaekwar spoke again.

"His highness reminds you of the fact that you have a gift from him—an amulet, which protects you from death."

"I have no such amulet!" Ross burst out, with an angry laugh.

"It was given to you by the Gaekwar himself," the translator insisted.

"I gave it in exchange for the girl!" declared Ross.

The clerk repeated this to the Gaekwar. The news was received, not only by the old king, but by all his people, with a babel of threats.

"Is it possible that you parted with it, thinking that the mem-sahib was worth more?"

"That is what I thought!" Ross shot back defiantly.

This was the signal for more imprecations; but this time the old Gaekwar seemed too much astounded even for anger.

"His highness bids me tell you that to do this was more inexplicable than laying down your own life; for that amulet was of a power sufficient to save you from the vengeance of men living or dead. It had the power to save you from death itself."

"The damned thing wasn't worth a copper pice!" Ross cried. "If you think it could save you from death, go and take a look at Grimsby's body. Probably he was wearing the bally thing about his neck when the runt elephant got him!"

The body of Grimsby Sahib was immediately brought and laid at the Gaekwar's feet. The ruler bent down, his glittering eyes bulging with surprise, with fanaticism, with dread.

Yes, there was the amulet upon the mangled breast of the dead man! There was the token from the gods, which gave its wearer immunity from the wrath of all men and all beasts! There it was, upon the

corpse of a man who had been dashed to death by a runt elephant!

The old prince reached down and snatched it away, staring at it as it lay in the palm of his trembling hand. As he riveted his eyes upon the little piece of stone, he could think of but one explanation of the mystery:

"Grimsby was killed, not by an elephant, but by a god. The dwarf gunda, like all things that are stunted in body, is divine. Against this dwarfed thing the amulet was powerless to save. Thus Grimsby was judged of the gods, and his death is a just judgment. So, too, is the death of the leaders of his band whom this white youth killed. The elephant—that is to say, a god—has passed judgment ordaining that this Grimsby was accursed, and that the youth who killed his followers is a just man, and deserves no punishment whatsoever!"

The Gaekwar signaled to his mahout to make the state elephant kneel again. The ressaltar commanded his sipahis—who were confused, impatient, in disorder—to march on, before the king's entrance into the gates of the city.

"His highness wishes me to tell you," the translator said to Ross and the girl, "that he had no understanding of this matter—not until the girl performed this act, which is a counterpart of our Hindu suttee. Then was everything made clear, or, I might say, illumined, as if, for instance, the dawn had come when the shadows flee away."

"You mean that he will not take her?" Ross cried, all but crushing the girl's frail body in his frantic embrace.

"Do you mean that he is not to be killed?" Jeanne Béraud exclaimed, in amazement and ecstasy.

"His highness says that you may go upon whatever paths you choose. There is no need of a passport while you are robed in the khilat which is the king's gift. Furthermore, the precious stones with which he adorned you are the jewels of a prince. As you pass through this state, you will be treated as if you were of the king's own blood." He concluded with a salaam. "What the king has said, he has said!"

The Gaekwar stepped up the ladder into his stately howdah, turned before the elephant swung off on the way, and spoke one sentence to the assembly. The translator repeated it to Ross and the girl:

"Blessed is the father who has a son like this man to perform the *sraddha* ceremonies after death!"

XXXVIII

THE Shah Jehan was steaming up for Bombay on the last lap of her regular course around the vast Indian peninsula. Her captain had made this journey so often that he knew almost instinctively just when the steering directions should be changed. He made his landfalls with the precision of a clock. He knew each reef, each hummock of land, each strip of coast to avoid or to keep close on board.

He knew that at seven bells in the morning after his last port of call—Colombo—a precipitous break would appear in the coast line of India. At about eight bells this break in the coast line would appear to be filled with a line of low, palm-tufted islets, indicating the delta of the Pangal River.

"A peculiar country, Pangal!" the skipper was in the habit of telling his passengers. "No Englishmen there. Quite an argument about that on our last down trip. Two of my passengers wagered about it. The young blood who lost wasn't satisfied with my statement, for it's my confident belief that he dived overboard and swam ashore, to find out!"

It was on this return trip that the captain of the Shah Jehan, as was his custom in moderate weather, laid his course a little closer to the shore. There was Pangal—a row of heavily timbered mountains, radiating heat. The little break in the horizon was dotted with islets that seemed like black specks against a glittering white background of steel. This hard, immobile plane of light stretched north and south along the dark green coast, fringed as far as the eye could see with a thin line of beach combers, so white as to seem like a flame.

Midway between the coast and the course of the Shah Jehan this steel-like plane appeared no longer flat, but broken in a long ground swell. Then, abruptly, the color of the water changed to a vivid blue where the sea deepened. The waves were interminable in their roll, but their surface was glassy, periodically cut by the short, birdlike flights of flying fish.

In the foreground of this scene—observed by the helmsman, by the lookout, and by a Goa bell boy who was serving iced drinks to the captain and a handful of passengers—there was a catamaran, lifted

lazily up athwart the ship's bow by one of the long swells.

The skipper did not see what he had expected to see in that primitive craft. Instead of natives with black bodies and white turbans, he saw two very strange characters. One was a man in blood-stained whites; the other, some sort of disheveled creature in rags, with a wealth of silken hair and a display of nude, olive colored arms and shoulders.

Responding to the sudden abeyance of its throbbing turbines, the ship swung to the pleasant influence of those long swells. Its wake subsided to a design of white froth on the dark blue water in which the catamaran drifted now about a furlong off the steamer's quarter. The man in it was waving a flag, or some sort of banner, of gorgeously embroidered silk.

The captain was confident that there had been some sort of disaster along the coast. Perhaps some coastwise packet had struck a reef, and these refugees wanted to be picked up, instead of making for the land. How they had got possession of a catamaran was a question. Possibly they had had a fight with some native fishermen.

A boat was immediately put off, and the two castaways came aboard. There was great excitement when they stood before the captain. The deck was crowded with passengers, officers, Goa boys, half-caste Sidi stokers, and stewards; and the excitement was due to something more than the spectacular drama of saving two souls from the sea.

The girl, who appeared to be greatly fatigued, was taken into a stateroom, under the care of the stewardess. The unshaven man in stained whites was told to take a stiff whack of brandy.

"Criminals—no doubt about that, sir!" one of the officers advised the captain, under his breath.

"I've seen that codger in some port or other," the first mate put in.

"Seen him?" cried another voice. "Damned right I've seen him. Desperate character at Colombo. Must have seen him the very last time—or else was it at Madras?"

The captain stepped up to the castaway. The ship, until now swinging easily with the long rolls, steadied herself as the turbines began to throb.

When the castaway and the skipper stood face to face, the onlookers understood

that it was a meeting fraught with a deeper significance than any one had bargained for. A peculiar cloud had come over the captain's sharp, angular face.

"I say, my man!" he muttered irresolutely. "Look here—I've seen you before myself. We've all seen you. Good God, you aren't—"

He stared, rubbing a hand across his forehead, as if he were in a dream. Yes, there was no doubt about it—he was looking at the same man whom they had lost on the last trip down the coast.

"I wouldn't have so much as guessed it," the captain exclaimed, "except that it happened—right *here!* We were talking of Pangal. You lost your wager. Couldn't pay it. Heaved yourself over—that's the way I understood it. What the devil does it all mean? And that woman—"

"We've been beating up and down the coast here for two nights and a day, waiting for a ship to pick us up. The particular vessel I wanted, and waited for, was the Shah Jehan; for that's the vessel which discarded me. I knew the general itinerary, and I expected you. You, captain, are the man who judged me. I couldn't pay my debt then. Yes, I jumped overboard, as you say; but I've come back to straighten my account!"

The skipper raised his eyebrows. Weren't that footling little quarrel and its wager forgotten yet? No—it was a point of honor. He spoke up with some heat:

"Do you mean you want to pay for the dinner which you ordered, but which was never served?"

"On the contrary, I want you to understand that I really won that wager. You said there were no white men in Pangal. I went overboard to see. I found an Englishman there—a man named Grimsby."

"In that case, sir," the captain said, "it is my opinion that you have won with colors flying and drums beating. Before that little point of honor is completely settled, however, the wager will have to be paid. You won. I, as the judge, passed a false sentence; therefore I shall pay." He called to his steward. "You remember the order given on our down trip for a dinner with my old Rajput chutneys and that coronation wine?"

"Do I, sir?" the steward exclaimed. "Ain't no one will ever forget that order, sir—not on this line, nor the P. and O.,

either. I thought we was to 'ave another Queen Victoria's jubilee—I did, sir!"

"It shall be a dinner fit for a queen's jubilee," the skipper said; "and it shall be given to this gentleman—yes, I remember your name—Gregory Ross, and," he added, "to his companion, whose name—"

He turned to Ross. Ross hesitated. He was aware that the name of Jeanne Béraud had probably been heard by every soul on board that ship. They had touched at Madras and Colombo, and the news of her abduction by a Pangal brigand had unquestionably reached them.

"We will present her at the dinner," Ross said.

The guests assembled in the dining saloon that evening. Before taking their places, they waited for the entrance of their host, the captain, and of the two guests of honor.

At that moment the skipper was in his own stateroom, in a conference with Ross—a conference over a very vital matter.

"You don't mind my confessing," the captain said, "that my impulse, when you came aboard, was to put you in irons?"

Ross nodded his head.

"I judged as much," he replied.

"You realize, I am sure, the seriousness of your position?"

"In regard to—" Ross indicated the stateroom aft, where the girl, having been presented with suitable garments for the dinner, was waiting for Ross and the captain. "In regard to her?"

"Yes."

"I do not consider my position in any way serious."

"In that case I had better make a statement," said the skipper. "In my last port of call I was advised by the Mercantile Marine Office that a crime had been committed in the southern part of the Central Provinces which had aroused the police and enraged the whole community by its extraordinary boldness and brutality. A desperado—so the report has been telegraphed everywhere—came out of the Pangal jungles and abducted the daughter of a certain indigo planter, a Frenchman named Béraud. If this criminal was driven back into the Pangal jungles—as the reports say he was—and if he attempted to get out of India, his only path of escape would be by way of the Arabian Sea. Well, sir, I find

a catamaran lying in the course of my vessel, its only navigators being a white man—white men don't ordinarily sail catamarans—and a girl who seems characteristically French in type."

"And you arrive at a very logical conclusion," Ross added. "Your deduction has been quick as well as accurate. I am that desperado!"

The captain scratched his sharp jaw. The man must be out of his head if he did not recognize the seriousness of his position. It might be best to put him in irons, after all; and yet—

"Look here, do you realize that if this woman were under age—"

"Which doesn't happen to be the case," Ross put in.

"Damn it all, sir! If it is not a technical case of abduction, you will have to pay dearly for taking a woman against her will from her home, and packing her off to the jungle!"

"Nor is that the case. It might have been so, but something has happened that has erased all that. She has consented to be my wife!"

The steward, it seemed, had forgotten nothing of that famous order given by the reckless young passenger on the down trip. A Goa boy behind each guest, peacock fans, dahl, pomegranates, khabob, Birni dates, sesame seed sweets, cognac and anisette in coffee, and the old Rajput coronation wine—nothing was forgotten.

The captain proposed a toast with his first glass of the dark, pungent vintage:

"I beg to announce that this is a wedding feast at which Mlle. Jeanne, daughter of M. Jules Béraud, is to be given in marriage to Mr. Gregory Ross!"

In replying to the toast, Ross put his hand above the skipper's glass.

"Cleopatra dissolved a pearl in a glass of wine—a silly old story, I take it. This little stone in your glass, and the bond that you are creating to-night, will never dissolve. No wine east of Suez, or west, will prove strong enough!"

The skipper held up the goblet to one of the swinging lanterns. At the bottom was a ruby sending out sharp rays of scarlet. It paid for the dinner ten times over; but Ross gave it, not in payment, but as a gift to the man who was to join him in wedlock to Jeanne Béraud.

THE END

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